

MCCPTA Sub-Committee on School Climate and Safety

2018-2019 Year-End Report

Submitted by Gillian Huebner, Chair

The sub-committee is a network of people who engage both intermittently and consistently on issues related to school climate and safety. It is open to the MCPS community. We meet mostly online and share information and opportunities for engagement through the MCCPTA listservs, the Health and Safety listserv (to subscribe, please email please email MCCPTA-health-and-safety-new-subscribe@yahoogroups.com), and the [MoCo Mental Health and Wellness Facebook page](#).

These are the issues we addressed during the 2018-2019 school year:

School safety

- Active assailant drills: This year, in alignment with the [Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018](#), MCPS rolled out an active assailant drill. The new drill in MCPS is called [Lockdown with Options](#) and has been developed in accordance with best practice by the Montgomery County Police Department. All school staff were trained during the first and second quarters as were some high schools. All MCPS students were trained in the new drill during the third and fourth terms. Each school informed its community when the student training would occur. On the day of the drill, counselors were available to support any student or staff member who expresses concerns or questions about the drills. Recognizing that the new drill procedures – and the reason for them – can be upsetting or cause for anxiety, MCCPTA worked with the MCPS [Department of Safety and Security](#) to host a series of five [community discussions](#) on school safety. MCCPTA has also shared resources for talking about lockdown drills with children: National Association of School Psychologists, [Talking to children about violence: Tips for parents and teachers](#); Child Mind Institute, [My school's new emergency plan includes lockdown drills. How can we keep them from scaring the kids?](#); Scholastic, [Lockdown Anxiety: Teachers talk about how to explain drills and calm kids' fears](#)
- School safety tip-line: Students, family members, parents, teachers, administrators, and other community members can anonymously report information to Safe Schools Maryland via a mobile app available for download through the Apple App Store or Google Play, online at www.SafeSchoolsMD.org, or by calling 1-833-MD-B-SAFE (1-833-632-7233). Trained technicians will respond to reports 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. The tip line staff share incoming information with appropriate school system officials and staff; law enforcement personnel; fire, emergency, behavioral health, and medical staff; and other partners to help prevent violent or dangerous incidents at schools around the state and provide assistance to students in crisis. Students, parents, teachers, administrative staff, and others should be vigilant and report any activity that makes them feel uncomfortable, nervous, or frightened about the safety of their school, themselves, or others. In many recent school violence incidents or threats, assailants have exhibited behavior that signaled a potential for violent activity or discussed such activity on social media. Some potential incidents around the country have been thwarted because alert students, parents, school staff, or others reported suspicious behaviors to appropriate authorities.

- [MCPS School Safety and Security at a Glance](#) provides information about the reporting of incidents related to school safety and security, school climate, local school safety program descriptions, and serious incidents. Information is presented for each school. A County summary is available [here](#).

School climate

- **Strategic Plan:** School climate is also an important feature of the MCPS [strategic plan for school safety and security](#). Key Priority Area #1 focuses on data-driven accountability for school safety and positive school culture as a system priority across MCPS. The strategic plan includes six recommendations for school climate:
 1. Make school safety and school climate as high a priority as academic performance by including safety metrics in the accountability framework for the district, as well as all schools and departments, and ensuring that this metric is taken into account in evaluations of MCPS employees.
 2. Develop a year-round communications campaign to promote school safety and positive school culture.
 3. Support systemwide implementation of MCPS's new online incident management system for the 2017–2018 school year.
 4. Convene regular meetings of senior staff, focused on monitoring security data, coordinating responses to critical incidents, addressing issues that arise in the implementation of strategies related to security and school climate, and reviewing lessons learned to identify opportunities for continuous improvement.
 5. Implement annual systemwide surveys of school climate for students and staff at every school and incorporate feedback into school safety and school climate planning. Use students in the design of the surveys and prevention/intervention programming. Design and implement school climate action plans.
 6. Develop a "School Climate" dashboard to provide an online monitoring tool for school climate data, as well as critical safety data, including arrests, bullying and harassment, gang incidents, truancy and chronic absenteeism, and school discipline
- **Bullying prevention and response:** Bullying has been a persistent theme throughout the year, and a prominent aspect of [the Montgomery County Council Youth Town Hall](#) in October 2018. Many parents have turned to MCCPTA to help navigate the school system's response to bullying complaints. Prevention and response vary throughout MCPS. Many schools have interesting and innovative programs underway, but until MCPS launched [Be Well 365](#) in spring 2019, there was not a way to measure/assess what is happening across the district. In 2018, MCCPTA advocated for an inventory and assessment of programs. We were pleased to see this included under Recommendations 6.1 and 6.2 of the [strategic plan for school safety and security](#): (6.1) "Conduct a systemwide inventory of all school-sponsored prevention and early-intervention programs currently operated by individual high schools." (6.2) "From the inventory of all school-sponsored prevention and early-intervention programs currently operated in high schools, develop a plan to assess each programs' efficacy and effectiveness (e.g., reduction in number of disciplinary incidents, overall school climate, overall student achievement)." The Superintendent offered [this overview of bullying resources](#) to the Board of Education on November 14th. To report

bullying, harassment, or intimidation within MCPS, use [this form](#). For more information on state-level anti-bullying laws and regulations, see [this resource](#).

- **Be Well 365:** MCPS launched a new initiative, [Be Well 365](#), in June 2019. Be Well 365 is intended to address the physical, social and psychological well-being of our students, working to ensure that students have the necessary skills to become positive members of the school and broader community; manage their emotions; build academic and social resilience; identify and access support for themselves or a friend; peacefully resolve conflict; and make positive decisions. As the initiative was being developed, MCCPTA facilitated three open meetings between parents and the [Office of Student and Family Support and Engagement](#) to discuss the plan. MCCPTA will continue to follow rollout of the initiative in the 2019-2020 school year.
- **Restorative justice/practices:** MCPS is not immune to widescale disparity and disproportionality in discipline. This has a discriminatory impact on students of color, with disabilities, and on FARMS, and impairs efforts to close the achievement gap. Last year, MCPS received a three-year \$1.2 million grant through the National Institute of Justice to infuse restorative practices throughout the district and empirically test results. Restorative practices promote:
 - Community building – strengthen relationships and build community by encouraging a safe and caring school climate
 - Self-care – reduce, prevent, and improve harmful behaviors
 - Conflict resolution – Increase accountability by identifying problems and solutions and restoring positive relationships

The small [restorative justice](#) team has already reached 98 schools, and plans to eventually integrate the program into all schools (restorative justice is one of the six essential elements of [Be Well 365](#)). The program has received rave reviews from students, staff, and families and has resulted in a 70 percent decline in office referrals for misconduct in its pilot schools. In addition, student climate surveys show improvements in how students feel about safety and relationships at the pilot schools. MCCPTA has worked closely with the MCPS restorative justice team to build parent awareness about restorative justice/practices, including three restorative justice parent workshops in 2019. MCCPTA has advocated for funding for the program at the Board of Education for Maryland and will continue to do so. MCCPTA also advocated for [House Bill 0725/Senate Bill 0766 on Public Schools, Student Discipline, and Restorative Approaches](#). The bill was enacted and will be effective as of July 1, 2019. The bill requires a school principal to exhaust certain procedures before suspending or expelling a student; authorizes a principal to suspend or expel a student before exhausting certain procedures under certain circumstances; requires each county board of education to develop a multiyear plan for the adoption, implementation, and continued monitoring of restorative approaches to student discipline; and provides for the contents of a certain plan.

- **Maryland School Survey:** Recent state law requires that all public schools in Maryland survey students about school climate. Starting in the 2018-2019 school year, all teachers and students in grades 5-11 took the [Maryland School Survey](#). The purpose of the survey is to gain valuable information about the quality and character of each school's learning environment so that schools can promote a climate that supports student learning. The survey measures four domains: safety,

environment, engagement, and relationships. The survey asks students about topics such as student engagement, interactions with adults and with other students in the school, the school environment, bullying, and safety. The survey does not ask about a student’s personal experiences, and students will not be asked to provide any information that might violate his or her privacy. The survey is confidential and school personnel do not have access to the responses of specific students. Each school will receive a composite score, combining teachers and students, to be used in accountability; a subscore for students, and for each student group as required by ESSA; and a subscore for teachers.

Domain	Description	Topics
Safety	Asks students if they feel safe from violence (physical and emotional), bullying, and controlled-substance abuse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional safety • Physical safety • Bullying • Substance abuse
Environment	Asks students about their instructional and physical environment, if school rules are clear and fair, and if good behavior is supported and rewarded.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical environment • Instructional environment • Fairness
Engagement	Asks students if they are treated equally and they have the opportunity to participate in all school activities, including those that occur outside of the regular school day.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural and linguistic diversity • Participation
Relationships	Asks students about the nature of teacher-student and student-student relationships and if their school has a culture of caring and respect.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student-student • Student-staff

- MCPS School Climate Survey:** MCPS also conducts its own [survey about learning environment](#). Survey findings can be used to monitor continuous improvement efforts and inform school improvement goals. Data collected from the climate survey and other tools provide the school and the Office of School Support and Improvement (OSSI) information about student, staff, and community engagement that can be helpful in the school improvement planning process. Data is collected from parents through the use of surveys as well as other events, including Back to School Nights, Open House, PTA meetings. Principals share the school climate survey with their administrative and instructional leadership teams to collaboratively develop an action plan for the communication of the results to diverse stakeholders and ensure shared decision-making in implementing a response to the data. Climate action plans focus on tangible goals adults can set to enhance the school’s learning environment and address areas of high levels of concern that create barriers to student success. OSSI supports and monitors the work of the principal and leadership team in addressing the areas of improvement identified in the data. **According to OSSI, parents should not expect to receive a summary of the school climate survey.** Informal and formal mechanisms exist for receiving input and feedback from parents, separate from the school climate survey. For instance, the district administers a parent engagement survey. That survey is developed and administered to a random sample of parents by the Office of Shared Accountability and the results are [posted online](#). **Principals and PTSA presidents should work together to determine the best mechanisms for gathering additional information and responding to each school’s parent and community interests and needs.**

Child abuse and neglect

During Fiscal Year 2018, 3,087 suspected incidents of child abuse or neglect were reported by MCPS staff, volunteers, or contractors to the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, Child Welfare Services (commonly known as CPS), or Adult Protective Services. Of this number, 353 cases allegedly involved staff, and 4 allegedly involved volunteers. All other reported cases were alleged to have occurred outside of MCPS by members of the community. Of the reports alleging MCPS staff involvement, 10 were indicated, a finding that there is credible evidence that abuse or neglect occurred.

In January, a cross-functional group of internal and external stakeholders convened to provide input and feedback to continuously improve the systemic and systematic work of MCPS in preventing, recognizing, reporting, and responding to child abuse and neglect. The team meets every six to eight weeks and explores additional matters of child protection and safety, including missing children, sexual harassment and abuse, hate crimes, rights of and protections for undocumented students, etc. The team includes representatives from MCPS, MCPD, Child Welfare Services, and parents with related professional backgrounds, including MCCPTA's sub-committee on school climate and safety. The team is convened under the leadership of the [MCPS Compliance Unit](#).

The Montgomery County Council Education Committee met to discuss MCPS safety and security and an update on the child abuse and neglect policy on March 4th. Further information is available through the following links: [Briefing on MCPS Safety and Security](#); [Update on MCPS Child Abuse and Neglect Policy](#); [Video of the work session](#).

Given the prevalence of child abuse and neglect nation-wide, MCCPTA has continued to share resources with the PTA community. This has included the following information:

- **Prevalence**: Child abuse and neglect are more prevalent than we'd like to believe, affecting children of all ages, races, ethnicities, and economic backgrounds in areas where they should be safe, including communities of faith, youth sports teams, schools, and in their own homes. There are four common types of child abuse and neglect: Physical Abuse; Sexual Abuse; Emotional Abuse; and Neglect.
 - According to data posted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there were 676,000 victims of child abuse and neglect reported to child protective services (CPS) in 2016.
 - As many as 1 out of 4 girls and 1 out of 6 boys experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 18. However, because child sexual abuse is by its very nature secretive, many of these cases are never reported.
 - Approximately three quarters of reported cases of child sexual abuse are committed by family members or other individuals who are considered part of the victim's "circle of trust."

- Twenty-three percent of reported cases of child sexual abuse are perpetrated by individuals under the age of 18.
- 90 percent of child abuse victims know their abuser. Approximately 30 percent of children who are sexually abused are abused by family members.
- [This fact sheet](#) provides further information about child sexual abuse.
- What to do if you suspect any form of child abuse or neglect:
 - In the case of an emergency, call 911.
 - To make a report of child abuse and neglect or mental injury, call Child Welfare Services (240) 777-4417 (open 24 hours).
 - To make a report of child sexual abuse, call Child Welfare Services (240) 777-4417 and the Special Victims Investigation Division of the Montgomery County Police Department (240) 773-5400 (open 24 hours).
 - Parents or guardians who are employees, contractors or volunteers in schools **MUST** follow the MCPS reporting protocol, which includes immediately contacting Child Welfare Services. In addition, a written [Report of Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect](#) should be submitted within 48 hours. This form is available in [multiple language](#) on the MCPS website. **All MCPS employees, contractors and volunteers are mandated reporters.**
 - Those who **are not** employees, contractors or volunteers in schools should immediately report suspected child abuse and neglect directly to Child Welfare Services and the Special Victims Investigation Division Montgomery County Police Department, per the above. Reports may also be made to a MCPS staff member. As mandatory reporters, all MCPS staff members must report immediately to Child Welfare Services without exception.
 - Please contact the [MCPS Compliance Unit](#) with any further questions regarding the process for reporting suspected child abuse or neglect: (240) 740-3214.
- MCPS policies and procedures related to child abuse and neglect: In June 2015, the Montgomery County Board of Education approved significant changes to [Policy JHC—Child Abuse and Neglect](#). The policy guides Montgomery County Public Schools procedures and protocols for recognizing, reporting, and preventing suspected child abuse and neglect of students. Further information on MCPS policy, regulations and reports related to child abuse and neglect are accessible in multiple languages [here](#) and include:
 - [Regulation JHC-RA Reporting and Investigating Child Abuse and Neglect](#)
 - [Memorandum of Understanding with Law Enforcement](#)

- [Employee Code of Conduct](#)
- [A Student's Guide Rights and Responsibilities](#)
- [Vetting and Training of Employees, Contractors and Volunteers](#)
- Reports to the Board of Education on Child Abuse and Neglect (multiple reports available [here](#))
- Reports to the Community (multiple reports available [here](#))
- Child abuse prevention in the MCPS curriculum: MCPS implements [Personal Body Safety Lessons \(PBSLs\)](#) with grade-level, age appropriate content for students in every grade from Pre-K to 12. These lessons were developed with input from national stakeholders and County partners, and are designed to empower students to recognize and report suspected cases of abuse without fear of reprisal. Parents and guardians may consider [these tips for talking to children about body safety](#).
- Volunteer Training on Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect: All volunteers who regularly support schools and students and those who attend field trips **MUST** complete the Child Abuse and Neglect volunteer training. [This online training module](#) provides guidance for volunteers to help keep students safe. The online training is highly recommended for any adult who cares for, works or spends time with children. For more information, see the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) regarding volunteer training.
- Other resources:
 - [The Tree House of Montgomery County](#) is dedicated to reducing trauma and promoting healing for child victims of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. Through an innovative collaborative process between the private and public sectors, key professionals come together on behalf of the best interests of victims.. This effective early intervention is essential to ensure that an abused child or adolescent develops into a healthy and productive adult, capable of forming trusting and loving relationships. Underpinning the work of The Tree House is the belief that the cycle of child abuse can be broken and the knowledge that child abuse and neglect is preventable.
 - [The Montgomery County Family Justice Center](#) is collaboration of public and private county agencies seeking to provide services to families impacted by domestic violence, in a family-friendly environment. Its mission is to promote safety, well-being, and healing for victims of family violence.
 - [Darkness to Light](#) empowers adults to prevent child sexual abuse. [5 Steps to Protecting Our Children](#) is an introductory guide for the prevention of child sexual abuse. They outline core principles for preventing, recognizing, and reacting responsibly to child sexual abuse and form the framework for the adult training program [Stewards of Children](#).

- [SafeSport](#) is committed to ending all forms of abuse in sport. This includes bullying, harassment, hazing, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual misconduct and abuse. Both the [SafeSport Trained](#) course and the [Parent Training](#) help you to recognize if an athlete is being abused.

Athletic Culture and Safety

Following the [October 31 sexual assault in a Damascus High School locker room](#), parents expressed significant concern regarding the culture/climate of MCPS athletic departments and sports teams.

Since the assaults, MCPS has implemented an action plan that enhances the supervision of after school athletics and extracurricular activities in secondary schools. The MCPS athletics' high school supervision plan and template for your reference. Currently, schools have the option of implementing a variety of character-building programs through athletic departments. Further assessment of programs will be initiated in the future, in coordination with other enhancements of the athletics program. The MCPS [Athletics webpage](#) includes links to resources for parents, students and stakeholders, as well as more information about how MCPS Athletics is promoting a positive culture. In addition, the [R.A.I.S.E. \(Respect & Sportsmanship; Academic Excellence; Integrity & Character; Spirited & Safe Competition; Equity & Access\) Report](#) provides information about steps being taken to promote a positive culture for all student athletes and professional development for MCPS employees working in athletics.

Of interest, [Coaching Boys Into Men](#) (CBIM) is a free program within Montgomery County, made available through the Family Justice Center's [Choose Respect](#) initiative. FJC has also begun piloting a similar program for female athletes, [Athletes as Leaders](#). Coaching Boys Into Men is a national program that utilizes the unique and important role that coaches play in the lives of young men. It includes a comprehensive toolkit that assists coaches in planning important discussions with athletes about respect for themselves, each other, women and girls, and that violence does not equal strength. Currently, CBIM is being implemented at Blair, Magruder, Northwest, Richard Montgomery, Rockville, and Springbrook High Schools, and Parkland Middle School. MCCPTA has urged MCPS to take this program to scale, ensuring that it is implemented in ALL MCPS middle and high school athletic departments.

MCCPTA had hoped to hold a community conversation on MCPS athletic culture and climate, but this was held up due to the State Attorney's Office investigation. We hope to move this forward in the 2019-2020 school year.

Preventing and responding to hate/bias incidents at our schools

A number of hate and bias incidents affected some of our school communities this quarter. Reports indicate that there were 65 incidents categorized as hate in 2017-2018 school year. To date, for the 2018 – 2019 school year, more than 30 incidents have been reported. Please note that this data is unofficial as some of these cases are still under investigation. This data will be finalized in the annual report on [School Safety and Security at a Glance](#). Maryland state reports on hate and bias incidents are accessible [here](#). Each report includes data as it relates to our county and schools.

MCCPTA encourages MCPS students, families, and staff to tap into resources to help our students and school communities to combat bigotry, discrimination, bias, and hate in all its forms. We have listed some resources below for your ease of reference:

- To report bullying, intimidation, or harassment within MCPS, use [this form](#).
- [The MCPS Policy on Nondiscrimination, Equity, and Cultural Proficiency](#) underlines that discrimination in any form will not be tolerated.
- [The MCPS Equity Initiatives Unit](#) works to advance racial justice and cultural proficiency by interrupting systems of bias (implicit and explicit), oppression, and inequity in our policies, practices and procedures by challenging every MCPS employee to be courageous, persistent and effective in confronting and resolving racial and cultural issues that impact everyone but disproportionately impact the academic and social-emotional success of students of color.
- [The Montgomery County Office of Human Rights](#) investigates incidents of hate/violence and complaints of discrimination. Victims of hate/violence crimes can seek compensation for replacement of property through the County's Partnership Fund, administered by the Office of Human Rights.
- [Communities United Against Hate \(CUAH\)](#) is a nonpartisan organization that unites our diverse community to combat bigotry, support victims of hate, and promote inclusiveness in Montgomery County, Maryland. CUAH is offering a [free training series](#) in 2019 to encourage comprehensive responses to hate and bias by engaging the public in Montgomery County.
- The [Anti-Defamation League](#) (ADL) is one of the nation's leading civil rights and human relations organizations. [No Place for Hate](#) is one of ADL's signature education initiatives, an organizing framework for K-12 schools committed to creating sustainable change that leads to improved school climate. Participating schools are able to incorporate ADL's anti-bias and anti-bullying resources within their existing programming to form one powerful message that all students have a place to belong. Over 1,700 schools across the country were designated No Place for Hate in the 2015-2016 school year. The goal of No Place for Hate is to inspire a national movement led by students and educators who are committed to using the power of positive peer influence to build inclusive and safe schools in which all students can thrive.
- [Teaching Tolerance](#) provides free resources to educators—teachers, administrators, counselors and other practitioners—who work with children from kindergarten through high school. Educators use our materials to supplement the curriculum, to inform their practices, and to create civil and inclusive school communities where children are respected, valued and welcome participants. Our program emphasizes social justice and anti-bias. The anti-bias approach encourages children and young people to challenge prejudice and learn how to be agents of change in their own lives. Our Social Justice Standards show how anti-bias education works through the four domains of identity, diversity, justice and action.
- [Cultures of Dignity](#) is an organization and online resource that works with parents, educators and young people to successfully navigate the challenges of young adulthood. [Owning Up](#) is a curriculum that teaches young people to understand their individual development in relation to group behavior, the influence of social media on their conflicts, and the dynamics that lead to discrimination and bigotry.

Communicating in crisis

Given the number of PTAs navigating crises this year, the MCCPTA sub-committee on school climate shared the following best practices with PTSA leaders:

Constructive communication is key in the midst of crisis. As a PTA leader, it is critical to communicate effectively with MCPS staff as well as with the parent community. Precise, timely, and relevant information is critical during any crisis, conflict, or emergency. Please keep in mind these best practices:

- The PTSA President is one of the first five people an MCPS principal will call during an emergency. Ensure that the principal and assistant principals have your full contact information and that you have theirs.
- Do not hesitate to contact the [MCPS Public Information Office](#) for updated information and messaging. Derek Turner is the Public Information Officer and he can be reached at Derek_G_Turner@mcpsmd.org or (240) 740-2387.
- If the communication lines with the school principal and administration are not working effectively, contact the [OSSI Directors for your school area](#).
- Ensure that your school community is aware of the [Maryland Safe Schools Tip-Line](#). Encourage students, families, and caregivers to download the app and save the number in their phones: 1-833-MD-B-SAFE (1-833-632-7233). Students, parents, faculty, staff, and members of communities throughout Maryland may use this anonymous, app- and web-based reporting system to share their concerns, including mental health crises, bullying, school and community violence, drug activity, abuse, harassment, and any other critical issues affecting Maryland students.
- **Ensuring safety, security, child protection and privacy are the first priority.** If law enforcement is involved, ensure that you are communicating in accordance with law enforcement directives.
- **Feed the facts, not the fears. Do not jump to conclusions.** As a PTA leader, your role is to provide essential information based on facts as they are known and understood. Rely on official sources, including MCPS and, if law enforcement is involved, MCPD. Document all of the necessary information, including:
 - A brief description of what happened
 - What is being done in response
 - Key contact information
 - Resources for student, family, and caregiver support
- **Facilitate community recovery and courageous conversations.** A crisis can affect entire communities in just a few minutes, while the recovery process may take weeks or months. Constructive and transparent communication helps to rebuild trust. As a PTA leader, you can help identify what your community needs to recover and communicate this to appropriate school officials. Work with your school, MCPS, and MCCPTA to identify individuals, programs, and resources to facilitate constructive responses to help your community recover.