To: MCCPTA Board of Directors
From: Gail Ravnitzky Silberglied, Chair, Technology Committee
Date: January 18, 2022
RE: Committee Report—January 2022

The Technology Committee is, essentially, the product of a merge of the Safe Tech Committee and the Virtual Learning Committee. This is our first report since the committee was re-formulated.

COMMITTEE OBJECTIVES: Task #1 was drafting a Work Plan and identifying our committee objectives, which are:

> • SAFETY: Advocate for safe and appropriate use of technology as a learning tool, and promote safe online and social media practices
> • VIRTUAL ACADEMY: Provide oversight and guidance to MCPS on the experience of students and parents involved with the Virtual Academy
> • SYNERGY: Advocate for students and parents to be comfortable and competent at reviewing StudentVue/ParentVue and other progress report information, and ensure that MCPS portals provide accurate and useful information to parents and students.
> • ADVISE: Evaluate and make recommendations for MCPS technology policies (cell phones, YouTube, etc.) and online data collection (registration forms, consent forms, surveys, etc.)
> • AWARENESS: Educate parents, students, and MCPS staff on best practices for technology use, and the impact of technology misuse on students' physical safety, mental health, and data privacy
> • PRIVACY: Advocate for appropriate privacy protections for students, and evaluate whether asking parents to "log in as your child" is appropriate

RECENT ACTIVITIES

- December 8 Attended the MCPS Digital Learning and Support Work Group meeting
- January 5 Held Committee meeting (We will regularly meet on the first Wednesday of each month at 7pm.)
- January 8 Participated in Operating Budget Workshop
- January 10 Testified to MCPS Board of Education
- NEXT MEETING: Wednesday, Feb 2, at 7pm

TESTIMONY

On January 10, Gail testified to the Board of Education about the proposed FY23 Operating Budget on behalf of the committee. Testimony covered: a) Synergy, b) chromebooks/future tech planning, and c) the need for tactile materials, such as actual books. Testimony is attached at the end of this report, or you can watch the video: https://go.boarddocs.com/mabe/mcpsmd/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=CAFP2Y6290F8# I begin at about minute 34:30.

At about minute 51:10, Lynn Harris agreed that we need more books in hands. She also asked the MCPS staff to respond on Synergy, and **Stephanie Sheron stated,** *"StudySync and all of our learning platforms on the secondary level do directly sync with canvas and synergy"* which prompted most of the audience to shake their heads to disagree. Gail spoke to Stephanie after the hearing, and will follow up.

PRIVACY AND SECURITY:

The Committee is discussing options for addressing privacy and security concerns. Two cases in point:

◊ Public schools in Albuquerque, New Mexico were closed on Jan 13-14 due to a cyberattack, and many other school systems have been victims of cyberattacks in recent months. What is MCPS doing to protect itself, is there a sufficient budget to secure our systems, and do we have a backup plan if our systems go down?

◊ Naviance, the online program used by MCPS students to manage the college research and application process, and Powerschool, the operating 'system' behind MyMCPS has been implicated in an investigative report to sell student data to universities that engage in aggressive marketing, sometimes using filters including race, gender, and family income to create a "drop out score." As such, we are interested in looking at alternatives to Naviance (such as Maia) and offering families an opt-out. Student data privacy does not seem to be a priority for MCPS, but we plan to engage Dr. Emily Bayer (Assistant to Associate Superintendent), who is now handling privacy issues for MCPS. Committee members are interested in the feasibility of conducting an audit of the use of student data. This is especially important as the number of online platforms used by MCPS students continues to expand.

ACTION ITEM:
We would like to collect feedback from Delegates and Board members about their students' experiences with Naviance, as we evaluate potential next steps. For example, are you concerned about how your student's data is being sold to universities and other organizations? Has your student been subjected to aggressive marketing tactics? Has your student expressed any concerns about using

DIGITAL BEST PRACTICES

As referenced in the testimony, we want MCPS to implement the Digital Best Practices, as outlined in the 2018 Maryland law (HB1110). A one-pager and a video have been created to help school districts implemented the law, but its use by MCPS seems limited at best. The Committee will be discussing next steps.

VIRTUAL ACADEMY

ACTION ITEM:
The Technology Committee is interested in learning more about how the **Virtual Academy** is going, how it is being evaluated, and how planning for 2022-2023 is going. Our understanding is that enrollment numbers are being sought for next year. We suggest inviting Virtual Academy Deans to an upcoming Delegates Assembly to provide

an update and hear about plans for the future, to help families make informed choices for next school year.

CONTACT US

Please reach out to join the committee, or with any questions, suggestions, or feedback at Technology@mccpta.org.

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TESTIMONY TEXT FOLLOWS:

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Testimony
By Gail Ravnitzky Silberglied, Chair,
MCCPTA Technology Committee
To the MCPS Board of Education
Monday, January 10, 6pm (in person)

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Thank you for this opportunity, and thank you for your Public Service on the School Board. We know it is often a thankless job.

I am Gail Silberglied, mother of 3 MCPS students, and Chair of the MCCPTA Technology Committee.

I have 3 technology requests for the FY23 Operating Budget:

Number One: Synergy. Also known as ParentVue/StudentVue it's the system for grades and assignments that, at least for parents, replaced Canvas/MyMCPS. It's where we go to see how our kids are doing. But here's a frequent scene in thousands of households.

[dialogue with daughter] "It says here that you have 3 missing assignments."
"What?" "In what class?"
"English"
"No, I don't have any missing assignments."
"Well, it says HERE that you DO."
"NO, I don't!! ARGH!!!"

Why does this happen? English assignments at the secondary level are in StudySync. Which despite its name, doesn't synch with Synergy.

That's just one issue with Synergy. There are many others. I have a list. So do students.

I urge you to implement improvements and upgrades to enable Synergy to automatically synchronize with all MCPS learning

platforms, without added burdens to staff, so kids can better track their own assignments. And these frequent arguments can be avoided.

Number Two: Chromebooks – I understand that nearly every student has a relatively new chromebook. But schools need more inventory to ensure that a working chromebook is available to every student, every day, in every class. Chromebooks get left at home, they run out of battery, and they can stop working suddenly. We must have more "loaners" or replacements on hand so students do not lose instruction time.

The next Operating Budget should also plan for the next generation of technology needs, and include a steady supply of working devices – and chargers – to serve every student.

Number Three: Actual books and paper materials –

Parents want to see more off-line options for students.

A workbook, a textbook, or a novel is not the same on a chromebook.

Here's what reading looks like for my 6th graders.

In the classroom, students read the book for a few minutes during class. But if they don't finish, they will continue reading at home… on their chromebook.

There are not enough books for each student to bring one home.

So, here's my daughter, reading a book, on a chromebook.

Textbooks are also now online, and students should have the option of a printed textbook.

Research shows that students learn better using tactile materials, particularly students with learning disabilities.

The FY23 Operating Budget must allow for kids to be reading actual books and having the option to bring home a printed textbook. Books are also more portable, more useful for parent participation, and better support academic achievement.

Do you, as Board members, use your laptop to review reports, budgets, and contracts? Or do you sometimes need printed materials, too?

Lastly, I want to discuss **Elementary School Counselors.**

Consider this question: How many elementary students should one counselor be responsible for? The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of no more than 250 students to one counselor. 250:1. In MCPS, the average in elementary schools is closer to 500 students. 500 students, for one counselor.

At a time when our kids are in crisis, and teachers are already going above and beyond, that ratio must decrease.

There is a current effort to hire 50 social workers at the high school level – which I appreciate and support – but the elementary schools desperately – and urgently – need more mental health support.

I urge the Board of Education to address the caseloads of elementary school counselors in the FY23 Operating Budget.

Thank you in advance for including the above priorities in the budget, and again for your service on the Board of Education.