

To: MCCPTA Board of Directors
From: Gail Ravnitzky Silberglied, Chair, Virtual Learning Ad Hoc Subcommittee
Date: May 10, 2021
RE: Virtual Learning Committee - End of Year Report

The Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Virtual Learning is pleased to mark one year of service to MCCPTA, after being created in August, 2020 to advocate for all MCPS students operating in the virtual learning environment. We have about 23 members and we met frequently this past year to address many issues that arose.

1. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Virtual Academy -- Our committee met twice with Kara Trenkemp and her team at MCPS as they were developing the Virtual Academy program. We provided detailed feedback both on the Interest Survey, and on the program itself. Nearly all of our feedback has been adopted or incorporated.

Mental Health -- We worked with the MCCPTA Mental Health Subcommittee to advocate for additional mental health support for students. We wrote a letter to Elizabeth Rathbone, MCPS Coordinator of Student Health and Wellness, and met with her and her team a few times, until Dr. Rathbone left MCPS. Those meetings have been on hold as MCPS replaces her.

Outdoor Space -- We have been advocating for a system-wide investment in outdoor infrastructure as part of the safe reopening of buildings. We have held meetings with Sean McGee (MCPS OTLS), Seth Adams (MCPS Facilities), Sharon Danks (Green Schoolyards America), Laura Collard (MAEOE), Laurie Jenkins (MCPS Outdoor Learning), although MCPS has not made any significant investment as of yet.

Special Education -- We worked with the MCCPTA Special Education committee to host a Town Hall meeting on how students with disabilities were faring during virtual learning. Over 200 people participated including several elected officials, and we showed a video compilation of students and parents telling their stories. We also circulated a petition urging immediate action to better serve students with disabilities, which garnered over 600 signatures.

Technology -- We wrote a letter to Pete Cevenini, MCPS Chief Technology Officer, on several issues including synergy/canvas/grading issues. Pete then made a presentation at the

November Delegates Assembly meeting on these issues. Technology issues continue to make virtual learning more challenging for students -- and frustrating for parents -- but MCPS leaders seem unable or unwilling to address them.

COVID Crisis Response -- We sent a letter to Superintendent Jack Smith to recommend improvements to how MCPS manages the COVID Crisis and communicates with parents, including forming a COVID Crisis Response Team led by a dedicated Associate Superintendent.

Equity Hubs -- We wrote a letter to Councilmember Will Jawando to request a meeting in support of Equity Hubs. Councilmember Jawando, who helped champion Equity Hubs when they began, has previously expressed to Laura Stewart his interest in advancing them.

Eliminating Waiting Lists -- We are concerned that 1,200 students who want to return to in-person learning are on waiting lists, some for as long as two months. We have drafted an urgent letter asking for information about the details about - and cause - of the waiting lists.

2. ACTION ITEM

Revised Work Plan and Committee Name, and New Subcommittees --We propose amending our committee's name and work plan for the coming year to more accurately describe our current work. The Committee would be renamed the Virtual Learning and Pandemic Recovery Committee. We will form Subcommittees focused on Outdoor Space; Quality In-Person Instruction; Social and Emotional Wellness; Technology Platforms; and Data and Evaluation. Accordingly, we drafted this new Work Plan:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vv-A_JuYIzwDV-5V40jytNfHdu0j5j1a-C_HX8vVnc/edit

REQUEST: We are seeking approval from the Board to amend our committee's name and work plan.

3. WHAT'S AHEAD

Virtual Learning will continue in the new Virtual Academy, and we intend to monitor the further development of this program, including the planning that would allow students to opt to transfer back to in-person school once they are vaccinated.

We are hopeful that this new program will mean that in-person students and teachers will have a renewed focus on learning in the classroom, preferably with books, discussions, worksheets, and hands-on activities, rather than a continued reliance on screens.

Our Committee also remains concerned about a range of issues, including unfinished learning; student emotional wellness; and outdoor infrastructure, which could have provided a safer option for return to school and alleviated overcrowding which necessitated schools to operate on an A/B system this Spring..

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