

Notes from the Superintendent's Engagement Session / Paint Branch High School / Oct. 21

(28 community members in attendance)

The superintendent opened the meeting with opening remarks about his vision and the purpose of this evening's session.

The two questions the superintendent asks attendees to provide input about are:

- Regarding operations, what is working well in the district, and what needs attention?
- Regarding academics, what should be done differently to improve student academic results?

1. **The speaker** brings up concerns about disparities in various areas, including access to certain classes and programs and even the application of discipline. She relates stories of seeing students of color receiving discipline in more significant numbers than other students. She feels this is still going on today, and she is also concerned about the school-to-prison pipeline. She is specifically concerned about black boys and black students identified as special needs (special education). School climate and well-being are essential to all schools.

The response: The superintendent agrees and talks about the importance of restorative justice. He further discusses sharing the data around these issues so that appropriate decisions can be addressed.

2. **The speaker** says she is going to raise four points
 - a. Raises concerns about insufficient textbooks or no access to electronic textbooks, so what are our kids using to study? How are they getting ready for assignments, tests, and more.
 - b. She says she never saw her kids get grades for spelling
 - c. At the middle school level, kids should get assessed for higher-level work
 - d. Greater amounts of Spanish instruction for students.
3. **The speaker** is with the Black Coalition for Excellence in Education. Just as we have essential topics such as the Holocaust taught in schools, we also have to deeply teach about the diaspora of blacks and African Americans in our classrooms. The speaker also asks how we recruit and hire more black educators, especially black men? His next point is about safety, and he is also concerned about the school-to-prison pipeline. How do we have a meaningful conversation about safety in the classroom?

The response: The superintendent talks about the truth of diversity in the career field of teaching. He encourages the audience to thank teachers for what they do and to realize that in our society, we have some significant hurdles to make this an attractive profession for more and different types of people. He says we should look at various kinds of benefits that might support other types of people who may consider teaching as

a profession, such as housing. The superintendent continues to discuss safety and how there are many aspects to safety. Facility, social, emotional, physical, and so much more. So much of what we are doing doesn't cost much money, such as our safety plans, are they good, have they been practiced and tested, for example.

The superintendent shares how this school year has gotten off to a great start, but we have issues to work on, such as chronic absenteeism.

4. **The speaker** asks about supports for parents to support their children. Especially for parents unfamiliar with how the U.S. school systems work.

The superintendent responds that better engagement with all parents is needed for the reasons the speaker is asking.

5. **The speaker** is concerned about the trauma that her daughter experiences in her classroom experiences. She is also concerned that the school administration is not doing enough to support her family and child. She is asking for more information on the website for these needs. She feels her trust has been broken and does not know where to turn for support. She wants her trust restored.

The superintendent directs staff to support the individual who just shared her concerns.

6. **The speaker** is with the Black Coalition for Excellence and Education and raises concerns about how the last speaker has been supported at her school. She further asks about what will be done to support that woman's child. She wants to hear a resolution when something wrong has been done, such as the print of the "N" word on 1000 sheets of paper at Wootton HS and the hanging of a noose on a fence at Sherwood HS. The speaker asks to hear the superintendent's equity plan

The superintendent responded that there would be an investigation into the concerns the previous speaker raised. He further talks about being unable to share every consequence because there is privacy around some of those things. He also talks about the school system's structure—he refers to Maslow's hierarchy of needs that must come before Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Supports, looking at the data on suspension, discipline, and expulsion. He further discusses how equitable access to resources and programs is an important part of responding to the problem because that is what we can and should do. We will not train our way out of the issue of inequity.

7. **The speaker** is concerned about access to programs that support her LGBTQ kids. She is also worried about access to gifted programs for her kids and that they are unavailable to them in their school. Specifically, how do we bring higher level learning to younger kids, such as in the K-2 grades. The speaker also talks about how confusing the testing reports and the report cards are...not understanding what that data means. How are parents to know how their children are doing?

The superintendent agrees and gives other examples of how confusing the grading and reporting are for parents, which needs to be addressed to better allow parents to be partners in their kid's education and growth.

8. **The speaker** is a teacher at the high school level, and she is speaking about how kids thrive with structure, including accountability. She uses the example of attendance. Lax attendance policies do not teach our kids about responsibility and the need to be in school and learning. She also asks the system to require final exams in all classes as that creates consistency, and again, students need those types of structures. Her final point is equitable access to programs across the county, and then she speaks to access to foreign language instruction.

The superintendent says the first inequities in programs appear in languages and fine arts.

Setting expectations and holding them to those expectations are critically important.

9. The speaker begins by discussing the restorative justice program and asks if there will be more funding to expand that program.

The superintendent says expanding and strengthening programs doesn't always mean more funding is the answer. There may be better structures to do that.

The speaker also points out suspensions are highest with our Free and Reduced Price Meals students. These are often families in constant struggles that impact students and their learning. She claims that this county is wealthy enough that this is something that we can do something about.

The superintendent discussed an equity add-on to support FARMs students at our schools better. He also discusses programs that aren't focused on postsecondary readiness. What is missing? A tool to monetize the school set. He uses the automotive example...students leave with a license but don't leave with a business plan.

10. **The speaker** is a staff member who feels like MCPS has lost its way. We are not the Baldrige county we once were. She feels she lacks the correct data to understand and move her students forward as a teacher. She also discusses applying the student code of conduct fairly and that we must be more consistent in applying those guidelines. She also discusses the need for restorative justice to be more of a policy than a process. She also discusses why we don't use our technology to provide better professional development for our staff members rather than in-person "sit and get" training.

The superintendent reflected on her comments and worked to simplify the speaker's concerns for assessments so the audience could better understand. He also discusses that the important things to us need to be part of the fabric of what we do rather than just throwing money at them.