

## MCEA President Jennifer Martin Update, May 25, 2023

I'm Jennifer Martin President of MCEA. Thanks for joining me this afternoon. We are in a much better situation than I anticipated earlier in the week. We had plans to potentially have a rally at the Board of Ed to press them to fully fund our contract and to not open us up to renegotiations, because we had the problem of the County Council not fully funding the budget.

We have been successful, thanks to the hundreds of members who have leafleted, participated in budget meetings, shared our stories, gotten 10,000 plus signatures on a community petition, and sent 3000 or more letters to the County Council demanding full funding. We delivered public testimony, we engaged in a sit in.

This was sustained powerful advocacy.

From the very first rally back in October of 2022, to letters we sent to County council later this year, we let them know the budget is not going to be enough for our students, and sent stories about the psychologists shortage, what our kids are facing coming out of the pandemic and our workload. While they skimmed on the funding for schools, we definitely moved them to a position where they said fully fund the contracts. So, we are in a position where the things that we bargained so hard for are getting set for next year.

There is a lot to be really happy about right now, but we're not quite across the finish line. The Board of Ed met today to review what cuts they're going to make, and I'll talk a little bit more about that in a minute. But what I can tell you is that they also are saying that they too do not want to reopen the contracts, they want to honor the contracts that we are ready to ratify

Again, that is not accidental, it's not out of the goodness of their hearts, it's because we are serious about demanding what we need. I hope that you understand how important the work that you have done has been to getting us to this moment and that it may take a little bit more work to get us all the way there.

For starters, it is wonderful news, you may have seen that we, on our end, have ratified the new agreement with MCPS, so our vote is in and done. 98% of folks who voted, voted in favor of the contract. That is wonderful news. Absolutely wonderful news.

It shows me that there is tremendous appreciation for what the negotiations team has done, and there is also overwhelming agreement that the things that we fought for are of value to meeting or beginning to meet the needs of our membership. So I'm truly, truly delighted to say we have a contract that includes the largest wage increases we've seen in my time in the system. I started as a teacher in the fall of 2002. I have never seen a wage adjustment of this level and the fact that we are back to July 1 for implementation of our wage agreement is something that has been long overdue. It should happen this way every contract, we should see our wage adjustments our steps coming in the beginning of the school year not in the middle, in order to save MCPS some money. We need this to be a routine expectation that our wages increase on July 1.

In addition to winning that very important wage improvement which I hope is going to help end the staffing shortages that we've been experiencing, that will hopefully attract new people to this work, I hope that a whole new generation is seeing that teachers are demanding and getting the respect that we are owed here in public education.

The wage agreement is, of course, a fundamental improvement. The Board of Ed understands that these wage improvements are long overdue and we as members agree that this is a good step forward for the next year and the year after.

Beyond that there are some specific wins that we can also celebrate with the contract. You know the elementary school teachers. I'm a secondary teacher but I've been out in schools enough to see the demands and really unnecessary and overwhelming burdens that are placed on elementary school teachers in particular. That's not to say that the rest of us don't have extremely demanding jobs. But there is now an effort that we are making with MCPS to expand planning time in our elementary school. We know our elementary school teachers get less and they need more. The scope of the work that is required of an elementary school teacher in terms of planning each day is really a burden, it is a huge responsibility, and there needs to be adequate time for that. So in ten to 20 schools there's going to be an effort to run a pilot to see what we can do to make sure that our students are getting quality education every step of the way, and our teachers in the classrooms are getting the planning time they need without decreasing the planning time of non classroom teachers. I think about the folks who are implementing, you have all been implementing new curriculum almost every year, in our elementary programs across several subject areas, this will give you greater access to planning time. We're starting small, but 10 to 20 schools is not insignificant. We fought hard; we wish we could get it for everybody all at once but we're going to get started there.

The other big win for us is that we have renewed our focus on equity and access for our historically underserved students. We're prioritizing the NBC cohort programs at our high impact schools so students with the greatest need will potentially have the most experienced educators with the most additional certification. We are doing this because of our longstanding commitment to equity here at MCEA. We want to make sure that our students across the board are getting high quality educators in every classroom and that we are supporting that every step of the way. By bringing these cohort programs to where they are most needed, we hope to be lifting up our students, and lifting up our profession.

With the wages, as I said, we'll have improved recruitment and retention efforts, but in addition to our salaries, there's going to be an increase over our contract coverage pay. It's doubling to \$30 next year and beyond, that will be in the contract. There are stipends and total compensation, both increased, so that we will be more truly competitive with our neighboring districts and so people are more fairly paid for the work that we are doing each day in schools.

Let's see, for those of you who may not have been paying attention, although I would imagine most of you have, let me give you the details of what you can expect to see with next year's wage increases.

All 10-month MCEA unit members are going to receive a general wage adjustment, and a cost-of-living adjustment of \$5,600 plus a step, effective July 1. 12-month employees effective July 1, 2023, will receive \$6,583 cost of living adjustment plus their step if they're eligible. In July 2024, all 10-month MCEA unit members will get \$2,918, plus a step for those who are eligible. And July 1 of 2024, if you're a 12-month employee you'll receive a cost-of-living adjustment of \$3,428 plus a step if you're eligible.

The reason we went with that flat amount for everybody is because there's such a need to bring our early career folks up to a living wage. Something that makes this County affordable to them, it also is a way to balance out the steps because over the years. COLA's have widened the distance between our early career folks and our most senior people in a way that is both uneven and inequitable so we're trying to close that gap and make things fair for everybody. I know that for those of us like me who are moving toward the top, it means that it is less of a percentage of our salary, however, I think everyone benefits pretty darn well when we get a \$5600 increase.

Today the board of Ed met and following the County council's final budget. I'm going to refer to some of my notes.

The long and short of it is that the school system was left with 88 million to find somewhere. in either cuts or to make up the difference to fund the budget. We're disappointed in the County Council. If they're going to do a tax enhancement, which they did at 4.7 cents per 100 square feet of property value, why didn't they go for the 7 or 8 cents that would have been needed? This would have been an ongoing funding source to take care of the schools and we feel it's very unfortunate. What's going to happen is the school system is going to be relying on one time money, things like the COVID relief money, for elementary and secondary schools emergency relief that was provided by the Federal Government to cope with the pandemic. That money is going away, that is one time money and they're using a good portion of it next year to fund ongoing operating experiences.

That is pushing the problem to the school year 24, 25, and I'll talk about what the looming concerns are there. But right now, we have one time money they're using to make the budget work.

To me and to all of us, that's not sound fiscal policy that the County council is pursuing but we're going to be doing our best to make sure that as we move on to planning the budget for 2024-25, that we are pressing the County council to show greater than fiscal forward thought and be more courageous and appropriate in asking for the funding that our schools need and deserve.

Here's what they ran through from the MCPS budget today. As I said there are about \$88 million in unmet expenses that are going to require finding money elsewhere. They're finding some savings in a couple of ways. One is they're anticipating saving \$30 million through additional resignations and turn over, meaning that as people leave, there will be savings either because folks are cheaper who come in to replace those who are leaving, or some jobs may be

left unfilled. \$29.3 million is going to come from that emergency relief I was telling you about, that was the COVID money. That is additional money they're spending from COVID relief fund that is one-time money, it will get us through next year, but it creates problems starting in the fall of '24.

\$20.2 million is going to come from reductions in the accelerator asks. Those were additional programs and expenditures that the Board of Education proposed to the County Council and the County Executive. They're taking \$20 million of those off the table. They left a few important things like additional English language teachers, the math coaches, and all the required programs and expenditures that are part of the blueprint for Maryland's future. Those by law they have to pay for. So there are things they have kept but a lot of things have been thrown out the window in order to make the budget work for the next year. An additional \$8.6 million they're taking out of the operating budget here and there, I think a lot of it is non school-based expenditures.

What the budget that the County council approved didn't take into account, is how enrollment is growing. It forced the school system to dip into a reserve fund in a way that will not be available for MCPS for '24 and '25, so there are real issues facing us as we move forward. There are places where they're expected to make these cuts that I'm sure none of you will be sorry to see go" the social emotional learning curriculum, "Be a leader in me," that contract is not going forward. There are some things that are more troubling, the food service for summer school is going to be curtailed in some fashion. Virtual academy resources are going to be reduced by one million. They had wanted to have professional learning days for us where at every level there was one day set aside so elementary, middle and high. There were three different days that were chosen where they were going to be out of school opportunities for students while we engaged in professional development, but those days are now going off the calendar because the out of school time program to provide meaningful activities for students and learning opportunities outside of school are having to come off the budget.

Tutoring is coming off the budget to the tune of about \$8 million, and next year in fiscal year '25, so July of '24, there will be a return to having students who can't afford to pay for summer school having to pay fees. They're finding money here and there in ways that have real impacts on our students and ways we felt were very much avoidable.

As I say, we have a lot to celebrate today because we have heard from the Board of Education that in the midst of all we're in, you'll notice what they're not talking about doing is reopening our contracts, forcing us to go back to renegotiate what we have worked so hard to gain this year. I think MCPS is gratified that we have a contract in place, and they are ready to ratify it on June 6th. We are waiting to see for sure that that is happening, so stay tuned. But every indication in our advocacy meetings, in what they stated publicly at the board today, is telling us that they do not want to reopen contracts. The County Council has urged them to maintain the contracts as written and ratify them so that we will move forward with those wage adjustments and we should be in good shape on June 6th. So stay tuned. We may be able to have a big celebration on June 6th, or if the winds blow in a different direction, there may be more work to do.

As I wind up giving you this little update tonight, the other thing to bear in mind, is all of these things that have been worked out for next year, many of the solutions that MCPS has found to deal with the budget shortfall this year from the County, what they are doing now, may not be available to them next year, some of it absolutely will not be available. And MCPS walked through what the 2024/25 school budget would look like, and they're already counting on meeting to have \$200 million more in the budget for 2024/25, just for the following items. One most important to us is fulfilling the contract. We have a two-year wage agreement and in year two the cost of those wage improve ever improvements is going to be in the neighborhood of \$110 million. That's across all three associations. It's about half of what it's going to be for the coming year. But it is substantial. So right off the bat they have to find \$110 million somewhere. The next thing they expect is enrollment is going to be up for about 2000 students for the start of the school year 24/25. That enrollment cost would be an additional \$20 million or so.

Then, they factored in a pretty conservative amount for inflation. They're saying about \$10 million marker for inflation. \$17 million for new blueprint implementation requirements and then \$40 million that they have to find because the ESSR money is disappearing, there won't be any of that this year, so it's an additional \$40 million they have this year but won't have next year. Let me rewind for a second. That \$40 million is that we have been spending \$40 million on ongoing operating expenses, so that is a lot of school psychologists positions, some of the counselors and other mental health professionals, some other things they have been paying that are ongoing costs, people we know, services that need to be provided, program that are a continuing responsibility, there's no money for that next year. But these things must continue for our students so that's the final \$40 million figure that brings us through all those elements to \$200 million that need to be found above and beyond what we have this year in the budget. So that would be for fiscal year 24/25.

So, many challenges. We have so much work to do to make sure that from here on out, we are continuing to advocate for what is needed for us to be able to perform our best in our jobs and for our students to have success in their academics and in growing to be happy, productive people in our community. I could not be more proud of what we've done so far this year. It has been an amazing journey. We were tireless at the negotiation table, in pressing for public support, in pressing for politicians to listen to us, and for the elected leaders to do the right thing. The County council was only willing to go part of the way in meeting our needs and the needs of our students. It is very disappointing. But we have an opportunity with every budget cycle to improve their want to hear us and do the right thing. And I think that we see a real change in the Board of Education's responsiveness to us and their willingness to partner with us in trying to do what is best for students.

So that is my, as they say on PBS, my brief spectacular take on all things MCEA right now. I want to say thank you for joining me this evening. I got a couple of messages from my computer telling me my internet has been unstable, so I'm hoping you were able to hear me. If this is a useful way for you to receive communication from MCEA, I would be happy to do another live stream at some point in the near future. So until then, until I see you at our next gathering either in person or out in the building as I'm out to visit with you as you're in your work or as we meet at

the next assembly or elsewhere, I bid you a good evening and again, congratulations for the great success that you have helped to accomplish so far on behalf of public education here in Montgomery County, on behalf of our professor and the students and the communities we serve. Have a great night.