

Good evening, colleagues.

Tonight is my last RA as president. So, I'm feeling a mixture of joyful anticipation and a sweet sadness as a chapter of my life in our union and our profession draws to a close. It's premature to say my work here is finished: as I explained earlier, among other priorities, the MCPS budget fight is in high gear and MCPS is still in flux as the search for a new superintendent is underway. The work will not let up, and neither will I.

Over the past three years, my term as president, we have been through so much.

Together we protested the school system's chaotic response to Omicron and successfully negotiated COVID leave and better class coverage pay. Together we won a contract that provides the best wage increases we have seen in more than 20 years. Together we worked to successfully elect our first Black governor and Asian-American lieutenant governor, and perhaps most helpful to our working lives, brought two new members to board of ed who have helped move the school system to address gross mismanagement by executive leadership in MCPS.

Our members, after years of inaction by MCPS despite our relentless efforts to get the system to address sexual harassment and bullying, escalated our actions and shone a light on the cronyism that was blocking our path to justice. Many thanks to our member, Alex Robbins, whose dogged investigative reporting brought national attention to the crisis we have been facing.

Together we have stood up for curricula and materials that reflect the cultural diversity of our communities, the many ways people create families and express their individuality. We have made it clear we believe students should see themselves reflected in the texts they read, and they should have opportunities to understand the different experiences of others.

And throughout all these external challenges, we have been strengthening our union, growing our ability to organize to solve local as well as systemwide problems. This year we have taken action in dozens of worksites across the county to improve our working conditions. We are learning the power of local collective action and reclaiming our profession's dignity.

Looking ahead, many challenges remain. Culture wars here and international wars abroad threaten to divide our communities and even our membership. The fundamental lack of financial commitment to public education by our county officials means we have to fight like hell for every dollar of the funding we and our

students deserve. And MCPS appears rudderless following the hasty departure of the previous superintendent.

But the instability of leadership at the top of MCPS means that we have a unique opportunity to use our collective power to shape the future of teaching and learning in our schools. We know what is needed to make our schools all they should be. We have the expertise needed to structure learning in our schools. We know what our students require for success. So, as we move toward the end of one school year and prepare for the next, be ready.

We're fortunate to have David Stein as our president-elect, who has consistently demonstrated his deep commitment to a democratically run union. And we can count on the new officers and our board to be responsive to membership and passionate in supporting our mission. Moreover, our staff, led by our brilliant executive director, Heather Carroll-Fisher, continue to strive for excellence in supporting our strategic vision and building our power.

But as good as our leaders and staff may be, we members standing together create the true strength and effectiveness of the union. Be ready to step up, speak up, and claim the collective power we have to regain the public's respect and support for our profession. Be ready to explain and push for changes that we know our students need and deserve. We can't wait for the right leaders to come to county government or MCPS management: together we have the power and the brains and the heart to move mountains.

Before I close, allow me to take a moment to thank Nikki Woodward for the phenomenal job she has done as our vice president. No one works harder than she does, and no one comes to the work with more creativity and positivity. She has done so much to improve our internal systems, to deepen our relationships in the community and with our affiliates, and to achieve our strategic vision for our union. Nikki, we are so grateful for all you have done here, and we know that you will continue to show that positive energy and fighting spirit summer as the VP of MSEA. We are so proud of you and so grateful for your service!