



**2022-2023**

**Commission on Children  
&  
Youth**

**Annual Report**



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## Mission Statement

The Commission on Children and Youth promotes the well-being of Montgomery County's children, youth, and families so that all young people may realize their full potential and become contributing, productive adults. The Commission advances its mission by: (1) identifying the needs of young people and their families, and the groups and agencies that serve them; (2) informing and advising the County Executive, the County Council, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Board of Education (BOE), and the community at large; (3) recommending policies, programs, funding, and legislative priorities; and (4) affirming the needs, aspirations, and achievements of all the County's young people.

## Commission Structure

The Commission and its committees meet on the second Wednesday of every month (September to June) from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. The Youth Advisory Committee meets from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. the first Tuesday of every month (September to June). The Commission meetings are open to the public. Currently, the Commission is hosting all meetings virtually. The scope of issues and priorities the Commission can address is broad and far-reaching. In order to focus its work, the Commission typically holds an annual strategic planning retreat in June and selects priority issues for the upcoming Commission year. Subcommittees are formed around the selected priorities. The CCY hosted a virtual planning retreat on June 7, 2023. In 2023-2024, the Commission elected to prioritize the following topics: LGBTQ Youth Support and Career Readiness.

# Letter from the Chair



## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION ON CHILDREN & YOUTH

September 01, 2023

The Honorable Marc Elrich  
Montgomery County Executive

The Honorable Evan Glass, President  
Montgomery County Council

The Honorable Karla Silvestre, President  
Montgomery County Board of Education

Dr. James Bridgers, Director  
Montgomery County Department of Health  
and Human Services

Residents of Montgomery County

Dear Mr. Elrich, Mr. Glass, Ms. Silvestre, Dr. Bridgers, and Residents of Montgomery County,

The 2022-2023 commission year has been exciting as we had a full panel of youth commissioners and the Commission first first-ever youth Vice Chair, Mr. Rishi Nixon. At our last meeting in June of 2022 the commission chose Equal Education and Safety Amongst Youth as its primary focus for the ensuing year. Much to our chagrin that these topics would weigh heavily on our community going into 2023. The county has experienced an increase in youth using substances such as fentanyl and experiencing overdoses on school grounds. To the educational gap between minorities and EML students post COVID. These have definitely been trying times for our community.

The youth commissioners focused on Financial Literacy, Health & Nutrition as graduation requirements, and Mental Health. At our 2023 Annual Youth Summit held virtually on March 1, 2023, the commission registered and welcomed over 40 students from middle and high schools throughout the county. The students engaged in transparent and lively discussions with other students via breakout sessions as well as other community representatives. It was an awesome experience for the youth of Montgomery County to hear from and ask questions of Council members Will Jawando, and Gabe Albornoz, and Board of Education members Brenda Wolffe, Lynne Harris, and the BOE's newest member who served on the commission this year as youth commissioner, Sami Saeed.

You will find included in this report the Commission on Children and Youth's findings and recommendations related to the two focus areas of Equal Education and Youth Safety. Also, enclosed in the commission report is a letter sent to the Montgomery County Board of Education advocating for financial literacy and additional Health and Nutrition credits to be added to the graduation requirements. Lastly, the mental health of our community is at the forefront of concern. Our youth commissioners share their recommendations on the topic of mental health for our youth in the county.

I am humbly thankful and grateful for the support of the students, parents, Board of Education, County Council, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the overall community of Montgomery County Maryland. Together we help build stronger communities and empower our youth to leadership and advocacy.

Sincerely,

*LaTanya R. Johnson*

LaTanya R. Johnson  
CCY, Chair 2022-2023

# Letter from the Vice Chair



## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION ON CHILDREN & YOUTH

September 01, 2023

The Honorable Marc Elrich  
Montgomery County Executive

The Honorable Evan Glass, President  
Montgomery County Council

The Honorable Karla Silvestre, President  
Montgomery County Board of Education

Dr. James Bridgers, Director  
Montgomery County Department of Health  
and Human Services

Residents of Montgomery County

Dear Mr. Elrich, Mr. Glass, Ms. Silvestre, Dr. Bridgers, and Residents of Montgomery County,

This year, the Montgomery County Commission on Children & Youth chose two major topics of great importance to issue recommendations on: preventing substance use in Montgomery County Schools and addressing pandemic learning loss for Emergent Multilingual Learners (EMLs) and special needs students.

I want to emphasize the intensive, data-informed, and socially inclusive process underpinning the creation of these reports to encourage your careful consideration of and action on these issues.

This year, our Commission sought diverse perspectives highly qualified to add to and shape the face of these recommendations. Over two-thirds of our sitting commissioners are persons of color and extremely qualified residents from all areas of the county. Every one of our ex officio members—school and government officials—was highly informative and added both professional insight and effective knowledge toward gathering information to supply our recommendations. Through our members affiliated with MCPS and DHHS, we identified external representatives to best educate our committees on the specialized areas the Commission investigated and were able to navigate multiple agencies more easily in search of information. Our committees' most notable speakers included MCPS' Associate Superintendent for Special Education, MCPS' Director of Multilingual Education, and the president of a large Montgomery County-based nonprofit working to prevent youth substance use. The input received was incorporated effectively into our recommendations under the leadership of each committee's chair and youth co-chair and was then streamlined to include straightforward, actionable measures.

We have endeavored to make our information-gathering process as inclusive, data-driven, and expert-informed as possible to convey the voices of Montgomery County residents best. Consequently, as you consider measures to ease the learning loss of the two groups most disproportionately impacted by the COVID pandemic lockdowns and address the increased danger of substance addiction to our schools, we ask you to please remember the recommendations detailed by our citizen Commission of parent advocates, policy professionals, healthcare administrators, government officials, nonprofit leaders, students, and concerned Montgomery County residents.

Sincerely,

*Rishi Nixon*

Rishi Nixon  
CCY, Vice Chair 2022-2023

## Commission Membership

The Commission on Children and Youth is comprised of 27 members, all who are appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by the County Council. Twenty-two of the members are divided equally to represent the following categories: 1) individuals with recent experience in agencies providing services to children and youth 2) youth and young adults from Montgomery County, and 3) parents of children and youth who live in Montgomery County. The remaining five members are ex-officio representatives from the following departments: 1) a representative from the public school system 2) a representative from an independent school in Montgomery County 3) a representative from the Department of Recreation and 4) two representatives from Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services. Each commissioner serves a three-year term with the option of serving two full terms. Youth commissioners serve a one-year term with the option of serving two full terms.

Parent Representatives	Private Agency Representatives	Youth Representatives	Ex Officio Members
Anna Marie Finley	Stephanie Clark <i>Leaders Institute</i>	Nikhita Bhatt	Kirsten Andersen <i>Linkages to Learning, Dept. Health and Human Services</i>
Michael Jimenez	Jose Diaz, <i>CCI Health Services</i>	Smrithi Chakravarthy	Renae McPherson, <i>Montgomery County Public Schools</i>
LaTanya Johnson <i>Commission Chair</i>	Kimberly McLurkin-Harris <i>MCPS Recovery and Academic Program</i>	Gretchen Gilmore	Jeanett Peralta <i>School Health Services, Dept. of Health and Human Services</i>
Tatiana Lallo	Chanel Speaks <i>EveryMind</i>	Tatiana Holland	Vacant <i>Private/Independent School Community</i>
Leon Peace		Rishi Nixon <i>Commission Vice Chair</i>	Vacant <i>Department of Recreation and Parks</i>
Albert Reed		Sami Saeed	
Gregory Tucker		Jackie Wang	
Corinne Yourman			
Anna Marie Finley			

### Commission Staff

Dr. Pearlina M. Tyson  
Program Manager, Department of Health and Human Services

## 2022-2023 Speakers

This year the commission welcomed several guest speakers to receive more insight and expert opinion into our two priority topics. Our Equal Education subcommittee welcomed the following guest speakers: *Norka Padilla (MCPS)*, *Norca Yarborough (MCPS)*, *Tamara Hewlett (MCPS)*, *Vicky Parcan-Lake (MCPS)*, *Nora Morales (Program Manager, Identity)*, and *Diana Wyles (MCPS)*. These speakers discussed emergent multilingual learners (EML) programs in the county. Prepared an in-depth presentation on the population of our community that this group encompasses. The challenges presented to EML students and resources available within Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS).

Our Safety Amongst Youth subcommittee welcomed *Joseph Zabel, the President of Arise and Flourish* as a guest speaker. Mr. Zabel shared insight into the Arise and Flourish program. That students experience difficulty with substance usage can have a safe space to share and receive support.

## Commission Activities

On October 26, 2022, the Commission presented the top two policy priorities for the 2021-2022 commission year which were, Youth Employment and Accessible Spaces to the Montgomery County Council HHS Boards, Committees, and Commissions. The video of the commission participation can be found by following the MoCoCouncilMD on YouTube.

On November 26, 2022, the top two policy priorities for the 2022-2023 commission year were submitted to the County Council HHS Committee. On March 1, 2023, The Commission hosted its 16th annual Youth Summit. This year, the roundtable was held virtually and welcomed approximately 40 youth from various middle and high schools throughout the County. Youth commissioners engaged students in a lively discussion focused on 5 key priority areas identified by the commission: equal education, safety amongst youth, adulting (financial literacy and health and nutrition), and mental health. Consistent themes emerged from the discussions on these topics. Overall, students expressed a lack of knowledge regarding MCPS policies on substance usage and resources available to students and parents. Students are highly concerned with the mental health of themselves and their peers. Students want safe spaces to be transparent and ask for assistance without punishment from school administration.

Students are still dealing with the aftereffects of COVID-19 and the gap in their educational experience. Students are still grappling with the loss of loved ones during the pandemic and other stressors. The youth also expressed their experiences and/or observations about the negative change in overall school climate post COVID. Specific youth responses included: policies to protect students needing assistance with substance usage issue. Financial literacy topics and health and nutrition courses should be made available to students. Schools should offer hours to visit with an on-campus therapist. Especially for students whose families lack the financial resources to seek private therapy.

## Priority Topic: Equal Education

This commission year, the Equal Education subcommittee focused on improving access to “equal educational opportunities” for underrepresented groups. Keeping in mind a quote by George Washington Carver, “Education is the key that unlocks the golden door to freedom.” The Equal Education subcommittee decided to prioritize emergent multilingual learners (“EML”) and students with disabilities. We believe that the young people in these groups represent a segment of the student population who are not making the same rate of academic progress as their peers, which as a result, can impact their social and economic freedoms in the future. Specifically, we aimed to identify potential gaps in services or areas of needed advocacy across the elementary and secondary education levels. Our subcommittee, which was composed of adults and students, met with, and heard from various stakeholders related to this focus area and solicited data sources to help us gauge rates of success for these identified groups related to academic and graduation outcomes. We were also fortunate to have the active participation of four MCPS students, including Sami Saeed, the new Student Member of the Board of Education, on our subcommittee. Specifically, we met with Norka Padilla (MCPS), Norca Yarborough (MCPS), Tamara Hewlett (MCPS), Vicky Parcan-Lake (MCPS), Nora Morales (Program Manager, Identity), and Diana Wyles (MCPS).

We have identified three specific recommendations that we believe would improve student outcomes and provide county stakeholders with data necessary to effectively advocate for these populations: (1) Make MCPS data easily accessible, (2) Continue to improve the recently started county-wide tutoring programs, and (3) Improve access to special education transition and compensatory services.

### ***1- Make public data access easier for Montgomery County boards, committees, and commissions, and the community at large***

Our commission recognizes the importance of data-driven decision-making to enhance the performance and effectiveness of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) programs and initiatives, as well as others at the local level and beyond. The ability to access and peruse MCPS data is crucial to inform the public. However, we have found access to MCPS data to be unnecessarily prohibited by excessive costs.

The Commission on Children & Youth (CCY) is an official county body, composed of members appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by the County Council. We are charged to advise these county leaders, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and the Board of Education (BOE) on issues that impact children and youth in Montgomery County. It is critical for the CCY to have access to data pertaining to county students regarding school performance, test scores, and other metrics to best perform its advisory role.

This year, the CCY requested test scores and student performance data from MCPS. MCPS rejected that request as too broad. We then limited our requested categories (e.g., average performance on standardized testing and graduation rates, disaggregated by subgroups). In response to our subsequent data request, MCPS asked that the CCY pay more than \$1,000 to cover its costs to provide the data. We believe such fees are prohibitive and excessive. We would expect this data to be routinely and readily available.

In County Council Committee discussions about the Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) budget, we observed that we are not alone in our experience, as Councilmembers expressed similar frustrations about access to MCPS data. (Opinion: Reforming Our School Budgets, n.d.). Policies that restrict access to data are counterintuitive to public discourse, create unnecessary confusion and leave room for misinterpretation. MCPS is a large and complex part of our county government that educates more than 160,000 students and as such, must make the data it collects accessible to the community it serves, to bring light to its achievements, as well as its challenges.

Additionally, we recognize that there may be resource gaps within MCPS with respect to lower-income youth and students with disabilities. MCPS engages with 165 partner entities for 250 programs (Montgomery County Public Schools, n.d.) In this connection, background information on MCPS Data Dashboards is not easily



accessed. Interested citizens need easy access to available information on how the school system engages and shares resources to assess and properly target viable solutions.

We see this problem as an opportunity for MCPS to course-correct data when it provides access for future commissions, the County Council, and the public at large. We encourage and recommend that the County Executive, County Council, and MCPS collaborate and find solutions to make access to public data easier and more affordable to help more people understand the valuable functions bodies such as MCPS provide to our community. Additionally, we recommend MCPS provide thorough publication data pertaining to the outcomes and goals achieved by such partner programs.

## ***2- Continue to improve in-school tutoring programs***

We recommend a continued focus on addressing the persistent and widened learning gap between Emergent Multilingual Learners (“EML”) and their peers during and after the school closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Namely, we suggest ongoing support of MCPS’ new tutoring intervention program, with a special focus on oversight and support of efforts to ensure EML learners have access to the program. Students in Montgomery County Public Schools lost the equivalent of 17 weeks of high-quality learning in math and 11 weeks of learning in reading due to COVID-19 closures. (Edunomics, 2023). While there is debate regarding which term best describes this hiatus in learning, we shall use the term, “learning loss.” Learning loss is a loss of knowledge or a reversal of academic progress which occurs during prolonged periods of disrupted education.

While learning loss due to COVID-19 interruptions has been felt across the nation, Maryland experienced a greater loss than the majority of states. (Hanushek, n.d). All Maryland students have felt the impact of that loss, especially students of color, many of whom make up the EMLs. In fact, data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (“NAEP”) shows that in Maryland, the achievement gap between white and Hispanic students (the demographic term used by the NAEP) widened following the pandemic (The Nation’s Report Card, n.d.). For example, data for Grade 4 mathematics shows the gap between white and Hispanic students widened by 15 points between 2019 and 2022. This widening gap is not isolated. In fact, for both 4th and 8th graders (the only two grades for which NAEP data is available), the gap between white and Hispanic students either remained the same or worsened in both mathematics and reading (The Nation’s Report Card, n.d.).

There have been a number of strategies that were identified as helping to narrow this achievement gap and one to note is the access to high doses of in-school, small-group learning. (Nickow, 2020). In fact, individualized, intensive tutoring has been shown to double or triple the amount of math that high school students learn each year. (McGuire, 2023). Beginning on January 25, 2022, Montgomery County began offering high-dose *virtual* tutoring through two third-party providers to all schools. (Montgomery County Public Schools, n.d).

This “high dose” program also includes in-school tutoring *outside* school hours by MCPS staff. It is here where the potential exists for an otherwise effective program to leave our EML learners even further behind than they were before the pandemic. Foreign language support for EML students by MCPS staff is limited and only possible when staffing is available (McGuire, p.29). This limitation is understandable, especially given the inevitable budget limitations which we all know exist and the myriad of other priorities inherent in running Maryland’s largest public school system.

The access to virtual tutors is novel in MCPS and may prove useful, but data shows that the best value to students lies in high doses of in-school, small-group learning. (Nickow, n.d.). As such, we recommend that the County Executive, County Council, and MCPS closely watch the data from this new program as it becomes available, make that data public and easily accessible, and quickly make changes suggested by the data to increase program outcomes. We should expect to see better outcomes from in-school tutoring programs compared to virtual tutors, and if so, respond by eliminating virtual tutors and reallocating those funds to in-school tutoring in schools where the EML achievement gap is greatest. We made such considerable gains prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and to see them evaporate and worsen over the course of three years is disheartening. While we may not have been able to avoid this proverbial cliff, we owe it to our residents - English-speaking and not - to close the gap.

### **3 (a)- Extending transition planning services for eligible students**

MCPS provides transition planning support to students and their families to aid the movement of students with disabilities from school to postsecondary outcomes. Transition services are designed to support these students as they move on to college, career, and/or community, and early planning is crucial for a successful transition (MSDE, p.3). Transition planning begins when students who are served by an Individual Education Program (IEP) turn 14 until they graduate from high school or formally exit the school system. Parents, guardians, and caregivers also play a supportive role in ensuring their students obtain the services necessary for a successful transition. Given the importance of parents, guardians, and caregivers in the transition process, and given that school disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the provision of transition services for eligible students, we recommend that MCPS (1) provide appropriate support to parents and guardians who may face language and/or cultural barriers that could impede their ability to adequately participate in and benefit from the transition process; and (2) extend the availability of MCPS transition services for eligible students to compensate for the loss of transition services during the COVID-19 pandemic, by extending the availability of transition services through age 21 for all students who were 12 years of age or over at the onset of the pandemic (even if they graduated high school by age 18).

### **3 (b)- Maximizing compensatory/recovery services for eligible students with IEPs**

To help students compensate for COVID-19-related learning losses, MCPS has been providing Compensatory/Recovery Services (CRS) for 6,405 MCPS IEP students, out of 20,585 total with IEPs (or approximately 31%) deemed eligible for CRS (Wyles, 2023). At this time, MCPS plans to continue with CRS through the 2023-2024 school year, and we agree that the extra support provided by CRS is an important step in mitigating pandemic learning losses for special education students. We recommend that MCPS: (1) routinely assess whether students receiving CRS for COVID-19-related learning loss are meeting outcome measures and that they continue to receive CRS beyond the 2023-2024 school year if they still do not meet predetermined metrics of academic success; (2) provide support to parents, guardians, and caregivers who may face language and/or cultural barriers that could impede their children's ability to adequately participate in and benefit from CRS; and (3) ensure that all students with IEPs who experienced COVID-19-related learning losses have been identified and are receiving the necessary CRS support.

We recognize current efforts made to provide all students equal educational opportunities. We also realize there are limited available resources to address sorely the needed concerns we have identified. In this regard, we believe the first recommendation (1) to be the most immediate. Its resolution would have the widest and most immediate impact with respect to our overall report, as well as other community groups and entities. We urge such data to be published at the earliest opportunity.

Certainly, our suggestions contained in the second and third recommendations (2 and 3) with respect to support for parents of impacted children also call for priority consideration as they are implemented over the term.

Our report contains other recommendations to be implemented over the next year, with respect to EML students and those with disabilities, which we believe will materially enhance and improve their access to educational opportunities and will provide medium and longer-term benefits.

## Priority Topic: Safety Amongst Youth

The Safety Amongst Youth subcommittee was composed of seven adults, including parents, agency representatives, and Department of Health and Human Services ex-officio members, and three high school students. The subcommittee focused on how substance use in schools diminishes the sense of safety students feel in elementary school, middle school, and high schools.

Committee members recommended a focus on how substance use in schools diminishes students' sense of safety in elementary, middle, and high schools due to the rise in substance use and overdoses among young people in the county. The subcommittee examined data in Montgomery County about substance use in order to examine gaps in services to decrease usage and students' opinions. We invited a speaker, Joseph Zabel, the President of Arise and Flourish—an organization that educates middle and high school students on preventing substance use. His expertise and findings from the annual Youth Roundtable are the basis for these recommendations. The roundtable participants shared their viewpoints about substance use in schools across the county and what needs to be improved in order for students to feel heard, included in activities to address substance use in school, and to feel safer overall.

The subcommittee's recommendations are presented below and aim to improve students' sense of safety and inclusion in school campuses.

### **1. Increase Student Involvement with efforts to address substance use:**

- a. Students are more responsive to messages from peers or other students than school administrators, teachers, or school publications. We recommend that MCPS convene student advisory groups at each school (so that there is representation from each school) that also feed into a larger, county-wide advisory group. This will allow administrators to get input directly from students as well as help disseminate information to the school community through the student advisory group members.
- b. MCPS should increase the use of other existing methods for engaging students and having them help share information on this topic through student government associations (SGA) and other active student advocacy groups.

### **2. Improve MCPS Communication and Transparency to Build Student Trust:**

The committee found that there was a level of mistrust of MCPS related to substance use and misuse. To address this, a main recommendation is that MCPS review and assess how they are currently communicating and disseminating information to students regarding the following issues.

- a. Provide as much information (within the legal parameters of confidentiality) as quickly as possible to students and school communities about substance misuse-related issues among students, such as an overdose on school grounds; or a rise in the availability of particular substances and related dangers (for example, fentanyl).
- b. Provide information about what schools and school staff are doing to support students related to substance use/misuse disorder.
- c. Regularly sharing information and actively promoting school-based and community-based resources and support for students who may be experiencing substance use issues and/or students who want to seek help on behalf of another student.

- d. Provide more information about and promote safe spaces in school environments: It was unclear to student committee members and student Roundtable attendees whether these safe spaces are available at all schools, how they work, and whether students can trust that what they share there is, in fact, safe.
- e. Provide more information about in-school services that promote wellness, providers of those services, and who is eligible to participate in services, such as DHHS funded Wellness Centers or Bridge To Wellness which provide therapy, case management and positive youth development services.
- f. Promote and provide more information about how students can join “youth safety advisory teams” which are part of the county’s well-being and safety efforts. The county says it has well-being and safety efforts and part of these are “youth safety advisory teams”, but students on the committee and roundtable attendees did not know about these teams. This opportunity for students to be involved should be communicated more effectively to student bodies.
- g. Provide more information about what schools are doing to prevent misuse, including efforts to bring in experts on the topic, curriculum that helps educate students on prevention strategies, regular updates of how the school is engaged in the issue in the larger community, and how they’re engaging students.

### **3. Clarify Policy on Seeking Help from MCPS Staff for Substance Use**

Policies on reporting or asking for help regarding substance misuse issues, i.e., a student who may be struggling who wants to tell a teacher or a student who wants to report the use of substances on school grounds reports

- a. Student Roundtable attendees said that they were unclear about MCPS policies about potential consequences of reporting substance use, by themselves or peers, or asking for help, for themselves or a peer, with substance use issues. MCPS should consider policies that support and encourage students to seek help from school staff, a recovery perspective, over disciplinary consequences for use, and a punitive perspective. These policies were not clear, and student Roundtable attendees didn’t feel that most students were aware of what the policy was for students who report these issues to a school employee, such as a teacher. For example, students worried that they could face consequences if they reported misuse among a student they knew. We have identified a few of these critical points.
- b. The MCPS Student Code of Conduct 2022-2023 ([montgomeryschoolsmd.org](http://montgomeryschoolsmd.org)) lists the use of or possession of alcohol, inhalants, or drugs/controlled substances as meriting a disciplinary response of Level 3 (Administrative Supported and/or Removal Responses) or Level 4 (Administrative Supported and Short-Term Out-of-School Exclusionary Responses).
- c. The MCPS Guidelines for Incidents of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Abuse Involving Students Regulation IGO-RA, Guidelines for Incidents of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Abuse Involving Students ([montgomeryschoolsmd.org](http://montgomeryschoolsmd.org)) states “State law encourages students to consult with educators on drug/alcohol abuse problems. The law affords protection to the student who seeks information or counseling on how to overcome drug abuse problems from a teacher, counselor, principal, or other professional educator. Information received or observations made by the educator during a drug counseling or student information session are kept confidential and are not admissible in any proceeding.” However, it also states that “Students who possess, use, or distribute, alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs on MCPS property shall be disciplined in accordance with the MCPS Code of Conduct”.
- d. MCPS Policy on Preventing Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Abuse in Montgomery County Public Schools IGN, Preventing Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Abuse in Montgomery County Public Schools ([montgomeryschoolsmd.org](http://montgomeryschoolsmd.org)) states that it is “...a framework for creating and maintaining a safe environment for teaching, learning, and working within Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) that is free of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.” However, it does not specifically address the conflict of reporting substance use or asking for help and potential consequences of use in school that might prevent students from trusting school to report use or seek assistance.

- e. Publicize policies that encourage reporting and asking for assistance through the Code of Conduct through different formats, such as posting as posters, using student groups, sending messages through school-based news channels (such as morning announcements), creating announcements on Canvas and social media posts.

#### 4. ***Improve and Augment Substance Misuse Prevention Education***

MCPS should review substance use education curriculum and consider increasing awareness particularly in middle school;

- ❖ Refocus prevention education and be more intentional about integrating it into the curriculum beyond one week in health class.
- ❖ Integrate substance mis/use prevention and education into Community School efforts for families and students.
- ❖ Increased parent/guardian engagement in substance use prevention or treatment
- ❖ Increased education for students about the prevalence of Fentanyl and its lethality

In conclusion, this subcommittee has outlined four main courses of action for improving the communication channels between county officials and youth to increase transparency, clarifying policies to students to increase reporting and asking for help, and increasing student awareness about substance use. The Safety Amongst Youth subcommittee strongly believes that these recommendations will benefit students and their families and increase feelings of safety and support regarding issues of substance use.



# Youth Commissioners Report

## Priority Topic: Mental Health

High school and middle school students from all over the county participated at our Youth Roundtable discussion. It is the subcommittee's belief that all students need access to the tools that will help them thrive in school. The subcommittee on Youth Mental Health was interested in learning and understanding what resources students would like MCPS or the County to provide. It was determined from the Youth Roundtable, more accessibility to mental health resources was a resounding need amongst students.

It was also determined that the presence of a language barrier presents challenges for EML students when accessing mental health services. For students who have limited English proficiency, navigating the complexities of mental health resources can be incredibly challenging, overwhelming, and isolating, suggested by an article by Deeta Gupta written about MCPS failing to provide mental health care for non-English speakers. Providing more mental health resources that cater to EML students can not only increase the accessibility of services but can also foster trust between students and healthcare providers. These resources should consider the unique linguistic and cultural backgrounds of EML students to provide culturally competent and sensitive care.

This next section contains our findings and recommendations for the Board of Education around opportunities to further explore the issue of mental health resources for these youth in the county.

The youth subcommittee is writing this recommendation to emphasize the importance of providing adequate mental health resources to EML students. As our society becomes increasingly diverse, we need to address the growing mental health needs of this particular population (Gupta). Mental health is critical to the success of all students. Without proper mental health support, students can struggle with social, emotional, and behavioral problems that can impact their academic performance and overall well-being (Gupta). By providing accessible mental health services to students with English as their second language, we can ensure that they receive the support they need to excel in school and thrive in their personal lives.

One major challenge for students with English as their second language is the cultural shock that can occur when adapting to a new country and learning a new language (Brown). These students may struggle to adjust to their new surroundings and face a variety of obstacles such as language barriers, isolation, and discrimination. All of these challenges can significantly worsen their mental health and contribute to feelings of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Nzanga). It is the responsibility of the community to provide resources that support the mental health of all students. Mental health services can help students learn how to cope with the stressors they face, communicate more effectively, support their transition to a new country and develop healthy social and emotional skills. Mentally healthy youth are more successful in school and in their personal lives (NASP).

### **What have we learned?**

Mental health is an area that needs a lot of focus among students in this generation. According to the CDC, in 2021, more than 1 in 5 students considered attempting suicide and 1 in 10 actually attempted suicide. These are incredibly concerning numbers.

“Children and adolescents in immigrant families are experiencing a mental health crisis, reflected in high rates of depression, anxiety, and self-harm,” according to a report by an agency affiliated with Johns Hopkins University that focuses on health equity for Latinos, and the Public Justice Center.

## Our Recommendations

1. Keep posters, Canvas announcements, or reminders in multiple languages up with information on where/who the in-school counseling services are.
2. Increase the amount of school psychologists/counselors that can speak multiple languages.
3. Communicate with EML students via surveys or open lines of communication on their comfort levels.

It is vital for the county to invest in more mental health resources for students who have English as a second language. Mental health and wellbeing are crucial aspects of a student's academic success and overall life satisfaction. We have witnessed the impact of mental health on students. For example, students with depression are more likely to have lower grade point averages (SPRC). Additionally, we know that mental health struggles are exacerbated by language barriers. We urge the Montgomery County Board of Education to take this proposal seriously and allocate resources to support the mental health needs of students with language barriers.



# Letter to the Board of Education

On November 1, 2022, the Youth Commissioners of the Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth submitted a recommendation to the Montgomery County Board of Education.

A copy of the letter has been added to the Annual Report to demonstrate the initiative, commitment, fortitude of our Youth Commissioners to recommend High School students in our county be taught personal finance and healthier nutrition options to preserve not only their physical wellbeing but their financial well-being for the future.

## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMISSION ON CHILDREN & YOUTH

November 01, 2022



The Honorable Karla Silvestre, President

The Honorable Shebra L. Evans, Vice President

The Honorable Brenda Wolff

The Honorable Julie Yang

The Honorable Lynne Harris

The Honorable Grace-Rivera Oven

The Honorable Rebecca Smondrowski

The Honorable Arvin Kim

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

On behalf of the Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth, we ask the Board of Education to emphasize an enhanced focus on material preparing students for adult life through both financial literacy and nutrition education.

To start, personal finance education is critical to best prepare students for adulthood and we, as a county, would pay our young people a favor by providing it to them in high school. Credible research shows that required high school personal finance is directly linked to students who pay less for college by seeking out aid,<sup>[1]</sup> get better credit scores later in life, and have lower delinquency rates.<sup>[2]</sup> Fifteen states, including Virginia, have passed bills requiring a one-semester personal finance course to graduate high school.<sup>[3]</sup> Dozens of school districts nationwide have followed suit, including eight in Maryland as of this year.<sup>[4]</sup>

MCPS must make personal finance a course requirement to serve students most equitably across the County. While hundreds of districts nationwide have *some* personal finance options, limited access will disproportionately harm students of color. While 1 in 10 students in these non-required districts got to take an optional course in personal finance, among schools with >75% students of color, that falls to 1 in 20.<sup>3</sup>



Since financial literacy courses are proven to improve a student’s future, our current system leads to disparities in outcomes for students of color. This means that the only way to ensure everyone receives equitable access to financial literacy is to require it for all students in MCPS.

Students across the country have expressed concerns that their classroom material does not teach knowledge or skills that could actually be useful to them in the future. In fact, this is one of the most common critiques of modern education worldwide. In the U.S. alone, 88% of adults say their state should require a semester- or year-long financial education course for graduation.<sup>[5]</sup> And students agree, as more than 1 in 4 students say they are not feeling prepared to be on their own financially when they enter college, with more than 4 in 5 saying the pandemic has made them more concerned about their financial future.<sup>[6]</sup> Now, more than ever, students and adults agree that financial literacy is a necessary subject for our future, and to stay progressive with current trends and our neighboring counties, it is imperative that MCPS ensures students receive financial education in High School.

Our state as a whole lags behind in personal finance. A third of Maryland school districts have a course requirement, but apart from Frederick and Prince George’s, the largest isn’t there yet.<sup>[7]</sup> This year, the American Public Education Foundation’s national financial literacy report card gave Maryland a C grade.<sup>[8]</sup> Montgomery County has the largest school district in the state, serving roughly a sixth of the Maryland student population. If MCPS were to institute this requirement, that could significantly improve the state’s standing.

With popular support, including a majority of MCPS teachers, counselors, principals, and parents,<sup>4</sup> we, members of the Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth, formally ask the Board to pass its resolution instituting a one-semester personal finance course requirement to graduate high school. It would lead to more equitable outcomes for students of color and increased college and career readiness, and MCPS remains the most progressive school district in Maryland.

In addition to its recommendations regarding financial literacy focused education, this commission also would like to emphasize the importance of a comprehensive nutrition education program for students, that includes components throughout the course of a student’s education at MCPS. We have two broad recommendations, which are further detailed below.

1. Determine whether additional time can be allocated toward nutrition focused topics within the existing health curricula.
2. When possible, integrate “hands-on” activities, such as cooking and gardening lessons into mandatory nutrition curricula.

It is no secret that nutrition is immensely important, with the CDC reporting that those who eat healthily are less prone to complications such as cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes. (5) However, the majority of the US population does not adhere to dietary guidelines, with less than 10% of the population consuming a sufficient amount of vegetables daily and less than 15% of US adults consuming enough food daily. (5) These kinds of eating habits can lead to serious nutrient deficiencies that significantly affect one’s quality of life.

Nutrition education can be a very powerful tool, and MCPS already includes “Healthy Eating” and “Nutrition and Fitness” units as part of its health curricula, which is a commendable step. (2) However, it has been found that 40-50 hours of education is optimal when the goal is not only for students to retain the information they have been taught, but also for them to utilize this knowledge to modify their own habits accordingly. (3) Unfortunately, given the other requirements of the health curriculum, MCPS students are likely spending far less than 40 hours yearly studying “Healthy eating”. This committee appreciates that each unit of health

curricula is carefully selected and designed and recognizes that given time constraints, it is very difficult for the recommended duration to be attained. However, even a small increase in the coverage of nutrition topics can significantly benefit students. Thus, this committee recommends an analysis of the health curricula across grade levels to determine if any additional time can be allocated for nutrition-centric education.

In addition to a broad analysis of the overall health curricula, this committee strongly encourages a thorough evaluation of the material currently taught in nutrition education. Given that the aforementioned constraints significantly limit the duration of time available for nutrition education, it is vital to ensure that every topic covered during this portion of the curriculum is both necessary and presented in an accessible and engaging manner. It has long been known that students’ retention of material varies based on the mode in which the instruction is delivered. More “hands-on” forms of learning have been shown to be more effective, with a Harvard study finding that students who engaged in active learning practices learned more than their counterparts who received more traditional lecture-style instruction. (4)

Nutrition focused content is particularly well-suited to such styles of teaching, and “farm to school education”, which can include cooking, gardening lessons, and field visits, can not only be fun for students but also equip them with practical skills that can increase their self-reliance. (5) Currently, such “life skills” are not covered in any mandatory courses and are instead taught in elective courses only offered in select schools. This forces many students to obtain these practical skills outside the classroom, which unfortunately not everyone is successful in doing, as 28% of respondents in a survey conducted by Impulse Research claimed that they did not know how to cook. (1)

This commission applauds MCPS’s commitment to student wellbeing, as evidenced by recent decisions including the implementation of the Health Education B requirement. We believe that taking into consideration the above recommendations will build upon these efforts to ensure that our students are prepared for the “real world”. At a time where kids are faced with global pandemics, unprecedented mental health challenges, and a rapidly changing world, some enhanced education about adulting would be a great way to help our Youth.

Sincerely,

The Commission on Children & Youth

# Policy Priorities for the Commission on Children and Youth 2023-2024

## **Priority 1: Youth LGBTQIA Support**

The Commission on Children and Youth seeks to explore current educational, health and resource needs of LGBTQIA youth in Montgomery County Public Schools. A focus will be placed on current resources and support available to LGBTQIA youth.

## **Priority 2: Career Readiness**

One of the aims of the Commission on Children and Youth is to ensure Montgomery County's youth readiness for the workforce once completion of high school. Emphasis will be placed on current programming and partnerships within Montgomery County Schools that prepare Montgomery County youth for the workforce.

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**Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services**  
**Children, Youth and Families Services**  
**Commission on Children and Youth**

**For more information about the Commission on Children and Youth, please visit:**  
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