

## SEAC Meeting Summary and Follow-up

Date: August 22, 2018

Meeting Topic: Discuss the arrest of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) school bus driver, Mr. Etienne Kabongo

### Key Discussion Items

#### **Safety/Hiring/Vetting**

Providing a safe and welcoming learning environment is essential to student success. An important step to providing this environment begins with the adults in our schools. MCPS conducts multipoint background checks on all employees to ensure that they are qualified, ethical, responsible, and meet high expectations for professionalism prior to being hired or interacting with students. Details about the hiring and vetting process for all employees can be found on the MCPS website at this link: <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/childabuseandneglect/vetting.aspx>

Additionally, MCPS is increasing the frequency of our employee fingerprinting program and Montgomery County Child Welfare Services Program (CWSP) background checks. Beginning September 2018, MCPS will initiate a re-fingerprinting program so that employees are fingerprinted on a regular cycle rather than only once at the time of hire. MCPS will do the same for the CWSP background check process. These regular and ongoing screening processes will be the first of its kind for a school district in the state of Maryland, and will add yet another layer of safety and protection for our students and staff members.

#### **Bus Safety**

MCPS has taken several steps to ensure transportation safety and will continue to make enhancements. Currently, 75 percent of MCPS special education school buses have interior cameras. MCPS is working to ensure that all special education school buses have cameras by February 2019 and that all school buses will have cameras before the start of the 2019–2020 school year.

Cameras on school buses are used as a deterrent and an investigatory tool. In light of the arrest of Mr. Kabongo, MCPS has implemented a new protocol for staff members, including systematic review of school bus camera videos, with even more frequent viewing of videos from school buses that transport nonverbal students.

On the majority of special education school buses, there is an attendant to assist students. An attendant may step off the bus for only a few specific reasons—to walk a student to their front door if their parent/ guardian does not meet the student at the bus stop, or to assist the student into the parent/guardian's vehicle. However, as a rule, attendants do not leave the school bus.

To strengthen support for our most vulnerable students, the Office of Special Education (OSE) has collaborated with the Department of Transportation to provide additional professional

development opportunities for bus drivers and bus attendants focused on working with students with emotional and cognitive disabilities. As part of this collaborative effort, the following safety protocols have been put in place:

- Bus teams will meet and introduce themselves to parents/guardians or other caregivers who bring students to the bus in the morning and pick up students at the bus in the afternoon, providing first and last names.
- Bus teams will meet teachers or paraeducators to review the students' profiles. Bus teams will prioritize the students and will meet the teachers of the most impacted students first.
- Bus teams will learn any unique needs of each student and plan for meeting those needs in everyday and emergency situations.
- Bus teams will maintain a seating chart which includes the student's name, telephone numbers (work, home, and/or any other number to be used in emergencies), and any other information that would be helpful in an emergency.
- Bus teams will learn and use the names of all students and interact pleasantly and often with all students while they are on the bus.
- Bus teams will assist students on and off the bus and secure them before bus is in motion.
- Bus attendants will record student ridership/attendance before or after each stop in bus attendant blue book.
- Bus attendants should be seated on the bus in such a position to be able to monitor all students and to react quickly to any needs/situations.
- Bus teams should always stay inside the bus when students are on board unless assisting with a student getting on or off the bus. Parents/guardians and caregivers are responsible for meeting the bus at the stop. If a parent/guardian or caregiver is not at the stop, and cannot be contacted, contact the depot for further instructions.
- Any driver or attendant will continue to immediately report to a supervisor any suspicious behavior or anything that just doesn't seem right.

### **Parent/ Community Outreach**

In the wake of Mr. Kabongo's arrest, MCPS took immediate steps to notify all community members. [The message](#) was sent across the following mediums:

- E-mailed to parents/guardians of all 162,000 students enrolled at that time
- Posted to the MCPS website homepage
- Posted to MCPS social media platforms (Twitter and Facebook)
- Shared with local media

MCPS also used these aforementioned mediums when it distributed [this message](#) providing an update regarding bus routes and [this message](#) regarding additional charges against Mr. Kabongo. All of the messages distributed were translated into the top six languages spoken by MCPS families.

Additionally, a call and email were sent directly to all families who were on Mr. Kabongo's bus route this summer and during the 2017–2018 school year.

MCPS has established a dedicated response telephone line to more quickly respond to parent/guardian questions and concerns regarding Mr. Kabongo. The number for this telephone line is **240-740-3214**. Staff members answering the calls are providing information and resources to callers. There was a concern that parents/guardians would not know about the call center information so another message was sent.

Moving forward, MCPS is examining additional outreach strategies to reach families who may have had contact with Mr. Kabongo.

## **Compliance**

The MCPS Compliance Unit is responsible for the oversight, monitoring, and coordination of applicable Federal, State and Local regulatory compliance. The Compliance Unit provides the infrastructure for institutional accountability and ensures every staff member is aware of MCPS expectations and has the necessary information to create and maintain a lawful, positive, safe, and healthy climate and culture in which all adults and students are able to thrive and do their best work. Additionally, it collaborates closely with the offices of Employee Engagement and Labor Relations; the Office of Student and Family Support and Engagement (OSFSE); the General Counsel; School Support and Improvement; and other MCPS staff members to implement our protocols for recognizing, reporting, and preventing child abuse and neglect.

The Compliance Unit is led by Dr. Donna S. Hollingshead, associate superintendent for school administration. In this role, Dr. Hollingshead serves as the systemwide child abuse contact, the primary contact for MCPS in consulting with CWSP and other County partner agencies, and coordinating MCPS staff members in response to reports of suspected abuse or neglect.

Prior to her current role, Dr. Hollingshead has served students as a high school classroom teacher for Biology, AP Biology, Chemistry; a high school assistant principal; a middle school principal; a director of school support; the executive director in the Office of the Deputy Superintendent; a community superintendent; the associate superintendent for elementary schools; and an adjunct professor at American University.

Dr. Hollingshead holds a Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degree and Master of Education (M.Ed) Degree from University of Maryland, College Park; and an Education Doctorate Degree (Ed.D.), from Bowie State University.

In addition to Dr. Hollingshead, the Compliance Unit staff includes:

### Mr. Gregory S. Edmondson

Education: B.S. degree, The Pennsylvania State University; Master of Science (M.S.) Degree, Hood College

Experience: elementary and middle school classroom teacher—Grades 3, 5, 6, 8; Assistant Principal; Principal; Director of School Support and Improvement; Adjunct Professor, Hood College; Compliance Coordinator

Dr. Gregory E. Bell

Education: Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) Degree, University of Maryland, Baltimore County; M.Ed, Howard University; Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), Ohio State University

Experience: Assistant Professor, Early Childhood Education Coordinator; Community-Human Relations Advocate, Department of Human Relations; MCPS Title IX Coordinator; Director, Diversity Initiatives, Office of the Deputy Superintendent, Office of School Performance; Supervisor, Diversity Initiatives, Office of School Performance, Office of School Support and Improvement, Office of School Administration

The Compliance Unit participates conferences, workgroups, and staff member trainings including:

Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Statewide Sexual Abuse and Sexual Assault Prevention Educator Conference; The Maryland Center for School Safety Conference; The Maryland Center for School Safety Child Abuse Workgroup; and the MSDE Child Abuse Notification Workgroup. MCPS staff members also participate in regularly scheduled meetings with CWSP, Special Victims Investigation Unit, the Montgomery County State’s Attorney’s Office, Treehouse Child Advocacy Center, and the County Attorney staff members to discuss cases of child abuse and neglect, and share best practices in case investigation, response, and victim and family support.

The Compliance Unit is responsible for developing (with support and review by content experts) and monitoring the completion by all staff members of the district-wide mandatory compliance training. This 11-module online training is designed to provide all MCPS employees with the information they need to know and be able to do to build and maintain a respectful workplace and create a safe and respectful environment for students. The topics include: Employee Code of Conduct; Equal Opportunity in the Workplace; Workplace Bullying; Ethics, Conflict of Interest, Expectations, and Guidance; Student Sexual Harassment; Supporting LGBTQ Students in MCPS; Religious Diversity; Suicide Prevention; Bullying, Harassment and Intimidation; Gangs and Gang Behavior; Preventing, Recognizing, and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect. Throughout the year, the Compliance Unit is the office that receives and monitors the MCPS reported Child Abuse and Neglect Forms, following up internally with schools and other MCPS offices (OSFSE, Compliance Investigations, General Counsel, etc.) and externally with partner agencies to ensure processes are followed and students receive the appropriate supports in a timely fashion. In addition, the Compliance Unit monitors, provides support, and resources to school staff members in many other compliance areas and serves as a liaison between schools and partner agencies.

**Personal Body Safety Lessons**

MCPS implements Personal Body Safety Lessons (PBSLs) with grade-level, age appropriate content for students in every grade from prekindergarten to 12. These lessons were developed with input from national stakeholders and County partners, and are designed to empower students to recognize and report suspected cases of abuse without fear of reprisal. The Chief of the State’s Attorney’s Office—Special Victims Division has commended MCPS on the PBSLs and shared publicly that these lessons are making a difference in children reporting incidents of abuse and neglect. In addition, embedded in the MCPS elementary and secondary health curriculum are age-

appropriate lessons on safety and injury prevention, family life and human sexuality, cyberbullying and social media, healthy relationships, harassment and intimidation.

PBSLs have been modified and implemented to meet the needs of special education students, including students in the Learning for Independence, Autism programs, School Community-based Programs and special schools. These modifications are to meet the appropriate instructional level of the individual students.

Individual schools/teachers were to modify the lessons and create materials using the same process they use for preparing to teach any lesson from the curriculum. These lessons may be modified using additional curriculum resources (such as *Health, Growth, and Development* from the Attainment Company). To help ensure implementation, schools are required to attest that lessons were delivered to students.

This school year, OSE in partnership with curriculum staff members and OSFSE, is taking steps to enhance current resources and standardize modifications for students with disabilities.

By the end of 2018, special education teachers of self-contained classes will be required implement the PBSLs in collaboration with the counselor, modifying lessons as needed to meet the needs of their students. Counselors will monitor the implementation/completion of the lessons for each class. Additionally, to ensure fidelity of implementation, the principal will be required to attest to the classroom implementation of PBSLs in general education and special education classrooms and programs.

For the 2019–2020 school year, MCPS will have standardized, modified lessons and materials that align with the grade level PBSLs. The materials created will be at differentiated levels to reach a variety of students. Modifications also will support students with visual and hearing impairments. Teachers will be provided training on implementing these lessons.

**NEXT MEETING:** There will be an update at the next SEAC meeting on Sept 27, 2018.