

1. HEALTH EDUCATION CURRICULUM

Background

The secondary school Family Life and Human Sexuality curriculum (which is an “opt-in” section of the health education curriculum) provides that with respect to matters of sexual orientation and gender identity, the lessons are not “scripted” (as they were prior to 2014), but rather that “instructional planning resources [are] developed similar to all other content areas, including sample learning tasks, suggested instructional resources, and teacher guidance (e.g., the American Psychological Association’s *Answers to Your Questions for a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation & Homosexuality*, available at <http://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/orientation.pdf>. This shift permits teachers to plan instruction based on the specific needs of their students, as they do in all other content areas.”

See [https://www.boarddocs.com/mabe/mcpsmd/Board.nsf/files/9JVRVT6D30ED/\\$file/6%2014%20Sec%20Health%20Ed%20Curr%20Framework.pdf](https://www.boarddocs.com/mabe/mcpsmd/Board.nsf/files/9JVRVT6D30ED/$file/6%2014%20Sec%20Health%20Ed%20Curr%20Framework.pdf) (pp. 5-6), adopted by the Board of Education on June 17, 2014.

Question

What is your position on the inclusion of information from mainstream American medical and mental health professional associations in the MCPS health education curriculum?

Answer

I support routinely updating MCPS Family Life and Human Sexuality curriculum using the latest research and recommendations and having this information reviewed by a panel that includes representatives from the LGBTQ+ community.

I remain concerned about how best to include gender identity and gender fluidity in the curriculum going forward. While teachers not having a script is in line with my personal philosophy as a college professor, we will need staff training to address new research in this area. Issues about gender identity and gender dysphoria require sensitivity and a willingness to stay updated constantly. We should be cognizant of the difficulties involved and support our teachers.

As a practical matter, we should have a BOE-authorized standing advisory committee that includes LGBTQ+ students, staff, and community members to drive this process, bring to attention the latest research developments, and engage in community outreach. This committee could nest similar cluster and school advisory committees and it should be asked to present annually/biannually to the BOE on progress.

2. ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

Background

MCPS guidelines and regulations make it very clear that the Board of Education “expects all students and staff to conduct themselves in a manner that demonstrates mutual respect without regard to an individual’s actual or perceived personal characteristics, such as . . . gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, [and] family/parental status.”

See, for example, *A Student’s Guide to Rights and Responsibilities, 2019-20*

https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/students/rights/1318%2019_StudentRightsAndResponsibilities_Web.pdf

and

Employee Code of Conduct, 2019-20

https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/staff/Employee_Code_of_Conduct/0002%2020_EmployeeCodeofConduct_BOOKLET_ENG_8%205x11.pdf

With respect to gender identity and expression, MCPS provides specific Guidelines.

See *Guidelines Regarding Student Gender Identity Matters*

https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/students/rights/1243%2019_GenderIdentityGuidelinesForStudents_WithCOVER.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1fdG_RUh714abpNNP_SDoWBF2nItAeuH44JkMT6PcpPw9pj6Db1_RJ99IY

Question

What is your view of MCPS anti-discrimination policies with respect to LGBTQ students and employees?

Answer

While we have in place formal anti-discrimination policies, community members have reported gaps between policy and practice. This was a point raised at a recent meeting of the LGBTQ Democrats of Montgomery County, where a member reported that someone making homophobic or transphobic comments is not automatically considered to create a hostile workplace unless one can prove that the person making those comments was aware of the presence of a LGBTQ+ person. This is the kind of complaint that needs to be investigated thoroughly and policy language changed to close the gaps.

The BOE should work with LGBTQ+ community members to push this work forward and, as a Board member, I will regularly consult with the community and seek advice on how best to address future issues.

I take seriously the view that we meet every single one of our students where they are. MCPS makes this claim with respect to academics, but I think it is more important to do this socially and culturally. Once our students find that they are accepted for who they are, it will enable academic learning.

3. SUPPORT FOR LGBTQ STUDENTS

Background

On February 4, 2020, the Board of Education's Committee on Special Populations reviewed its *Support for LGBTQ Students Update*. This review included discussion of MCPS initiatives for support of LGBTQ Students.

[https://go.boarddocs.com/mabe/mcpsmd/Board.nsf/files/BLGMQD5B4A33/\\$file/200204%20LGBTQ%20Students%20Update.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/mabe/mcpsmd/Board.nsf/files/BLGMQD5B4A33/$file/200204%20LGBTQ%20Students%20Update.pdf)

Question

What is your view of the initiatives announced in February 2020?

Answer

The February 2020 announcement from MCPS/BOE, in particular the acceptance of asserted gender identity, is extraordinary as an official statement from any school system. It reflects far-reaching acceptance of evolving gender identity norms and is a wonderful example of where we should aspire to be.

The goals of this document will be hard to achieve financially and culturally, and it will require dogged support from the BOE, MCPS staff, and the community. For example, I imagine gender-neutral facilities will take time to convert/build and during this time we have to make adjustments necessary to create a more welcoming environment for all our students.

I also think we will face challenges with respect to updating our curriculum around gender identity. This is an evolving field with new research out regularly and it will require teachers and staff to remain abreast of developments. It is equally likely to cause friction with those who oppose inclusion. We have to look into developing a process to address these conflicts expeditiously.

4. SCHOOL NAMING

Background

In 2018, the Board of Education decided to name the new Rockville Cluster Elementary School after Bayard Rustin, a gay African American civil rights activist who was instrumental to organizing the 1963 March of Washington, which became the platform for Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream"

speech. <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/publicinfo/Bayard-Rustin.aspx>

Question

What is your view of the naming of Bayard Rustin Elementary School?

Answer

I am proud to have a school name after Bayard Rustin close to my home. His understanding of the powerful effects of economic injustice can be used to help fight all forms of racism, sexism and homophobia. I am aware of the struggle involved in pushing through Rustin's name in the face of opposition, including the central role DC PFLAG played, and I hope the experience of naming Bayard Rustin ES will shape our willingness to elevate other local heroes less celebrated because of dominant cultural prerogatives and to move away from other names that can be problematic.

5. IF THERE IS ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH US, PLEASE DO SO HERE:

I want to see MCPS bring special emphasis on mental health for LGBTQ+ youth. As a group, LGBTQ+ youth experience disproportionate rates of homelessness, and account for up to 40 percent of the homeless youth population.

As a group, LGBTQ+ youth are among the most bullied in our schools. This has to change. I have been thinking if it is feasible to take a designated LGBTQ+ counselor in schools, though I can also see the problem of limiting it this way. Certainly, we should have LGBTQ+ support groups in every middle and high school and I have worked personally to put folks together.

In organizing the Annual Mental Health and Wellness, we have held breakout sessions on LGBTQ+ mental health every year. This year we were fortunate to have MoCo Pride lead the breakout and I thought the panel was successful. I worked with Mark Eckstein early on as he seeded the tremendous LGBTQ+ outreach and training he has been doing with MCPS.

We do need more staff training, parent academies, and other outreach. The outreach is especially important for new immigrant groups who bring with them cultural values opposing LGBTQ+ rights.

Further, our regular curriculum should reflect more closely the lived experience of our students, including LGBTQ+ students. I would like to see community engagement—perhaps through the advisory committee—to identify books, articles, film, podcasts, etc. for use by teachers. A formal process of referral from the advisory committee to MCPS curriculum review process might smoothen the process for inclusion and pave the way toward belonging.

