

The following is forwarded on behalf of Mr. Roland Ikheloa, chief of staff, Office of the Board of Education.

Dear Ms. Tribble:

In recognition of our ongoing partnership, I am pleased to inform you that the Board of Education would like to meet with the following clusters this coming school year on the dates listed below from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.:

Thursday, February 10	Sherwood Cluster
Thursday, February 17	Northwest Cluster
Wednesday, February 23	Damascus Cluster
Thursday, March 10	Seneca Valley Cluster
Thursday, March 17	Paint Branch Cluster
Thursday, April 7	Einstein Cluster

Board members view these meetings as an opportunity for us to get better acquainted with the community and to discuss positions on issues pending before the Board. Given that the Board is made aware of major initiatives in the cluster, as well as pressing budget needs in advance of the cluster meeting, please advise cluster leadership that there is no need to have presentations that repeat this information. Board members are eager to use the cluster visits as an opportunity for two-way dialogue with the cluster leadership and community members on issues of concern to that particular cluster. So, we encourage clusters to use a meeting format that fosters opportunities for two-way interaction and avoids simply asking questions of the members of the Board.

Given that the Board and MCCPTA share an interest in reaching out to a broad cross-section of the community, it is the Board's hope that these cluster visits will be an opportunity to reach out to all parents. Proactive outreach is crucial and the Board is interested in exploring ways to hear from more community members in your respective clusters. Although the PTA would still set the agenda, please explore creative ways to include a broader audience during some segment of the program. You may wish to structure the cluster visits to have some time for PTA leaders to visit directly with Board members, as well as some time that welcomes the larger community. For example, there could be an hour set aside for the PTA leadership to talk with the Board followed by an open meeting for the community, or there could simply be an open reception at the end of the meeting that invites the entire community to come meet with the Board. Visits could be extended from 7-9 p.m. to accommodate community time. The Board is willing to help support outreach efforts with communication tools and resources, including reserving appropriate space that would facilitate interaction for a larger community event.

Additionally, the Board would like to establish some easy follow-up procedures with you to enhance the productivity of the cluster visits. It is important for the Board and the appropriate MCPS staff to follow up on questions or concerns raised and share the information obtained with the PTA leadership. To help facilitate this, we suggest that someone from the PTA be designated to take notes or minutes of the meetings to capture the major themes and concerns. It would also be helpful to have a designated PTA leader who would contact the Board after the meeting to determine the necessary follow ups, such as getting the community an answer to a question or documenting that a concern has been forwarded to the appropriate MCPS staff member.

In the past, each cluster has provided light refreshments for this meeting, and has chosen the school and the room in which the meeting will be held (often the media center, cafeteria, or all-purpose room). While we have certainly appreciated this kind gesture, please know that during these difficult economic times there is no obligation to provide a meal or undertake such an expense. In terms of other logistics, we would appreciate cluster leaders informing Ms. Becky Gibson (becky_gibson@mcpsmd.org) in the Board office of the location as soon as it is determined. We ask that a listing of the meeting participants and a draft agenda be sent to Ms. Gibson by email, or by fax to 301-279-3860, at least two weeks prior to the meeting so that we may share the materials with Board members and they can come to the meetings prepared. In terms of other preparations, it is my understanding that cluster leaders will contact their MCCPTA area vice presidents if they need further insights on how these meetings have been conducted in the past; however, they can also contact me if they have any questions.

Although we have copied the cluster leadership on the email, we ask that you also publicize the meetings, especially where there has been or you are expecting a change in leadership. So we can ensure that the cluster leadership involved in making these meetings a success have received this email, I would appreciate a response from everyone copied on this email acknowledging the receipt of this information. Board members look forward to the opportunity to meet with cluster representatives and community members, and will make it a priority to attend the PTA cluster meetings.

Thank you for helping to spread the word and we look forward to a wonderful new school year!

Ikhide Roland Ikheloa

Chief of Staff-Ombudsman

Office of the Board of Education