

## ***DEAF VEE COPY: VOICES OF MSD SURVIVORS' OPEN LETTER OF DEMANDS***

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12 August 2020

ATTN: Board of Trustees  
Maryland School for the Deaf  
101 Clarke Place  
Frederick, MD 21705

We span diverse ages, genders, racial and ethnic identities, sexual orientations, backgrounds in exposure to and fluency with sign language (i.e., ASL, BASL), and geographic regions. All of us were once students or parents of students at the Maryland School for the Deaf [MSD], at one or both of the campuses at Frederick and Columbia, some briefly and others for years, some of us having graduated and others leaving for various reasons. We descend from all-hearing families, families of mixed Deaf/hearing members, and multi-generational Deaf families. We are survivors of racism, nepotism, cisheterosexism, bullying, and white Deaf elitism at the Maryland School for the Deaf [MSD].

Some of us have shared our stories and reported to the appropriate authorities at MSD, including the Board of Trustees, before while others are doing so for the first time, and we have experienced and are experiencing further pain and trauma from being retaliated against and shunned within our own communities for telling the truth. An official Facebook page, Voices of MSD Survivors, has been put together as a public site for all of our stories.

MSD has long boasted as being one of the top schools for the Deaf across the country, but only elite white Deaf students have benefited for it. We fear for the well-being and safety of current and future BIPOC and non-elite white Deaf students at MSD. Not only do we know MSD can be better, we demand that MSD do better; we gathered together to put forth our demands, organized by category, and we expect an official written response from the Board of Trustees and the Board of Public Works within 72 hours.

### **The Superintendent**

- 1) Remove James E. Tucker as the current Superintendent from MSD without the capacity of collecting a pension and start an immediate search for the next Superintendent.
  - a) The hiring process for the new Superintendent must involve BIPOC and non-elite white Deaf community members, MSD parents, and MSD parents to the fullest extent possible. The entire process must be fully transparent, and the community's input will account for at least 51% of the vote after the Board of Trustees ensure basic qualifications have been met for the position.

### **MSD Faculty and Staff**

- 2) Use a third-party company with no previous or current affiliation with the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing [ODHH], the Board of Trustees at MSD, or any other Deaf-based organization or program for the initial screening of candidates prior to the first round of interviews.
  - a) The Chief Diversity Officer position must be a permanent part of MSD's structure as a solid position of power.
  - b) Prioritize the hiring of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and POC) staff to adequately reflect the current racial and ethnic ratio of BIPOC students in the student population; the hiring process is expected to be based on merit, not solely on the color of the candidate's skin.
- 3) Employees with more than five complaints or incident reports that implicate their involvement, direct or indirect, during the course of their employment with MSD are to be removed from their positions with no possibility of working for MSD in another capacity or of returning at a later time.
- 4) Every relative of employees must be placed in different departments to minimize any conflict of interest. No employee is to supervise their own relative or the department their relative works in.

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- 5) All MSD Teachers who also work as Head Coaches or Assistant Coaches must provide at least 90 minutes in between the end of the school day and the start of the practice/game for students in need of tutoring to receive satisfactory academic support.

### **Accountability to MSD Families**

- 6) All parents must be notified immediately via their own preferred language in their preferred mode for any incident or academic struggles their child may be experiencing, including hearing and non-elite Deaf parents.
- 7) MSD is to provide support for students from poor home environments, including resources and tools for their families.

### **Support for MSD Students**

- 8) Enforce the use of equivalency tests that do not have any cultural or racial bias as a weighed key factor in the unbiased academic placement for students. Put in other words, students who clearly qualify for regular, Honors, or Advanced Placement courses should be put there rather than remedial, alternative, or "special needs" courses.
- 9) BIPOC Deaf students are to receive equal access to the education elite white Deaf students receive at both campuses, including the extent of academic accommodations and other support (i.e., tutoring, teacher feedback and engagement).
- 10) No segregation on the basis of race or disability is to occur across the ELY and the VOC buildings.
- 11) MSD needs to invest in students and their families who may not have the cultural awareness of the Deaf community and ASL.
  - a) One specific method we call for is the provision of weeks-long summer camps where middle school and high school students transferring to the Frederick campus can have immersive experiences for awareness, inclusion, and language exposure.
- 12) Create inclusive events or camps where students from both campuses interact with each other, deepening their exposure to and understanding of diversity.

### **Sports at MSD**

- 13) Enforce education as a higher priority than sports, year-round.
  - a) Increase support for BIPOC athletes who are struggling academically (we expect the Coaches and Teachers to check in with the BIPOC athletes on what kind of academic support they would like to have).
- 14) When it comes to the screening and selection of players for the team in sports, ensure that all potential players go through the same process that is fair and just.
- 15) Arrange family-friendly events at MSD as an alternative to sports-related games, tournaments, and other events.

Understand that none of the action items are optional. Together as survivors, we consider those non-negotiable and essential to the safety and prosperity of BIPOC and non-elite white Deaf students and their families, to the restoration of integrity and trust at MSD as a whole, and to the well-being of the MSD community as a whole. As the start of the 2020-2021 Academic Year dawns on us, we expect the Administration at MSD to publicly respond within 72 hours with a full timeline of expected completion on our 15 demands and to continue giving public updates on their progress for the 15 demands. Any delay of action on this is justice denied, and we will do what we believe is necessary to hold the Administration at MSD accountable.

Signed,  
BIPOC and non-white Deaf alumni and parents of MSD

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CC: The Baltimore Sun  
Governor Lawrence Hogan  
Lieutenant Governor Boyd Rutherford  
The Baltimore Sun  
The Frederick Post  
The Black Lives Matter Foundation, Inc.  
ACLU  
Maryland Association of the Deaf  
Baltimore City Association of the Deaf  
Baltimore Black Deaf Advocates  
Maryland Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing  
Maryland School for the Deaf Alumni Association  
Maryland Senate  
Maryland House of Delegates  
County Executive Jan Gardner  
The Washington Post  
State Superintendent of Maryland Schools, Dr. Karen B. Salmon.  
The Board of Public Works  
James E. Tucker, Superintendent