



****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

****Antisemitic Incidents at Montgomery County Public Schools Spark Urgent Community Concerns****

Following the attack on Israel by Hamas on October 7, 2023, Montgomery County Public Schools (“MCPS”) permitted several student walkouts to take place during the school day. These were all allegedly in support of the Palestinians and they occurred as follows: Clarksburg HS and Poolesville HS on November 9, Paint Branch HS on November 10, Northwood HS and Springbrook HS on November 17, and Sherwood HS on November 29. The walkouts have not proceeded without incident, contrary to what school administrators in their communications to staff, students, and families, would have you believe.

Online posts with pictures from walkouts illustrating antisemitic messaging, along with MCPS emails and information therein obtained through the Maryland Public Information Act (“MPIA”), raise serious questions about the handling of these events and the broader implications for the safety and well-being of the school community, particularly Jewish and Israeli-American students and staff. It also raises the concern that MCPS is failing to vigorously investigate the groups involved in organizing events.

At a Board of Education meeting on January 11, 2024, Montgomery County parents testified after learning of some of these alarming reports of antisemitism at the walkouts including students using phrases and speeches containing terms like “Zionist entity,” “apartheid,” and “Free Palestine, from the River to the Sea.” Pictures from the walkouts also showcase students holding offensive signs, including some that read “Gaza is a concentration camp,” “We can’t breathe since 1948,” and “Victory to the Palestinian Resistance”, negating the Jewish right to a homeland. Some of the approved signs included messages like “by any means necessary,” and “resistance until liberation,” which, at minimum, denied the brutal massacre of Israelis and civilians on October 7.

Member of the Maryland Jewish Alliance (MJA), Laura Strashny, presented testimony based on emails obtained under the MPIA related to the walkout that took place at Paint Branch HS. A gasp was heard at the Board meeting when Ms. Strashny repeated the antisemitic phrases that were used at the Paint Branch HS walkout and reported to administrators by a teacher: “We should bring Hitler back” and “Kill the Jews”.

The gravity of allowing antisemitism to fester and grow in MCPS and other Maryland public school districts cannot be overstated. These and similar incidents have not been adequately explored by the media and warrant a closer look.

****Incident 1: Hate Speech and Inadequate Response****

At Paint Branch HS, it appears that the school administration only found out about the planned walkout the night before it was scheduled to take place. Key figures, the principal and the Muslim Student Association (“MSA”) club sponsor, did not know who had organized it. Despite this and without adequate investigation, the walkout was approved for November 10.

After the walkout, the MSA club sponsor reported hearing blatant antisemitic phrases and she was able to identify one of the students saying them. Specifically, she heard two students yell “we should bring Hitler back” and “Kill the Jews.”

Shockingly, despite this hate speech, in an email to the school community, the principal described the walkout as “positive, peaceful, and respectful”. The principal also rejected the plea from the MSA sponsor to address the hate speech in any follow-up email.

From: Meshel, Brooke R <Brooke_R_Meshel@mcpsmd.org>
Sent: Friday, November 10, 2023 1:12 PM
To: Krawczel, Pamela W <Pamela_W_Krawczel@mcpsmd.org>; Penn, Belinda M <Belinda_M_Penn@mcpsmd.org>; Bangerd, Timothy R <Timothy_R_Bangerd@mcpsmd.org>
Subject: FW: PBHS- Student Walk-Out, Nov 10

I applauded and congratulated our students who planned and carried out the demonstration. I am proud to have supported these students in their exercise of free speech and gathering the community in support of a cause. However, I did hear one comment from a student saying “we should bring Hitler back” (that student was [REDACTED]) and another student say “Kill the Jews”. I would like an additional email stating that such comments are not tolerated, do not align with our school or MCPS values and result in consequences. Antisemitism is not a joke and must be taken seriously. Unfortunately acts of antisemitism are at an all time high. It is the job of our school and MCPS to protect our Jewish students and staff. There is no room for hate in a safe environment. As educators we MUST undo years of teaching of hate against those who were once persecuted for who they were and what they believed. This of course includes the Jews.

Of further import, the MJA investigation uncovered no evidence that the administration responded to the bigoted comments in line with the [MCPS Hate/Bias Reporting Guidelines](#). Spokesman for MCPS [Christopher Cram](#) reported that the identified student denied making the comment and was not disciplined. This is further supported by emails released to the public. Adding insult to injury, the principal excused absences for participating students, contrary to established regulations.

From: Krawczel, Pamela W
To: Meshel, Brooke R; Penn, Belinda M; Bangerd, Timothy R
Subject: Re: PBHS- Student Walk-Out, Nov 10
Date: Friday, November 10, 2023 1:24:22 PM

Hi Ms. Meshel,

I really don't think that it would be appropriate to send out another email to address the behavior of two students. We can certainly address the comments made by those two students.

****Incident 2: Disturbing Connections and Erosion of Values****

At another walkout at Clarksburg High School, a walkout associated with an outside organization, the Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM), took place on November 9th, the anniversary of Kristallnacht, a historically significant date marked by the Nazi regime's violent attacks against Jews.

An email to the principal from a student representative of the MSA proposing the walkout is below (as well as the reply from the principal). The student highlights the association with the PYM and warns that the walkout will probably happen whether there is approval from the school or not.

In response, Principal Owusu expressed pride in the Muslim Student Association's decision to support the event, providing microphones, speakers, and excused absences.



Good evening Mr. Owusu,

I hope this email finds you well. I'm reaching out to you on behalf of the Muslim Student Association at Clarksburg. As you are aware, the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been a point of concern for many students, including students at Clarksburg. As a result, the national Palestinian Youth Movement has organized "Shut it Down for Palestine" on Thursday, November 9th. This event calls for all students to walk out of school, employees to walk out from work, and to protest the Israeli and US government. Clarksburg's MSA is in unequivocal support for a ceasefire and would like to walk out this Thursday to demonstrate that stance. As Americans, it is our right to protest and we would like to do so in a manner that complies with school rules. Similar to the walk out SGA held against Gun Violence, we plan on having student speakers, an open letter + petition to Congress, and contact local news.

We would like to meet with you as soon as possible, in person or virtually, to further discuss our walk out and hope we can come to an agreement on how to proceed. Respectfully, it is highly likely that students will be participating in "Shut it Down" regardless of whether it's approved or endorsed by the school.

Hello [REDACTED]

Thank you for emailing me. Wednesday, 11/8/23 I will be out of the office at an all-day meeting and unable to meet with you. I have copied Mr. Haynes, Assistant Principal, to meet with you. I am proud that the Muslim Student Association has made a collective decision of support. Please make plans to see Mr. Haynes regarding plans for the Walk Out. Please be aware that such a serious topic is important to many students, staff, and community and it will be our responsibility to inform our community. While I know our staff, students and community are diverse in race and culture, we are also diverse in our positions within this ongoing conflict. It will be important to be cognizant of diverse viewpoints and sensitive to our students, staff, and community that are directly impacted. When meeting with Mr. Haynes or other members of the administrative team they will help plan the event with this in mind.

I will see you on Thursday.

Take care,

Edward

Edward Owusu
Principal
Clarksburg High School

Prior to the Clarksburg HS walkout, school administrators instructed student organizers to submit proposed chants, posters, and speeches in advance for review. What the students submitted that morning was laden with anti-American sentiment and antisemitism, advocating for violent resistance and the destruction of the Jewish homeland. These messages included: "By any means necessary" and "Resistance until liberation."

From [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, November 9, 2023 12:59 AM
To: Douglass, David J <David_J_Douglass@mcpssmd.org>
Subject: Re: Proposed Protest Calling for an end to the Palestinian Israeli Conflict

Good evening (though I guess it's morning lol) Mr. Douglass,
To this document, I have attached the speeches [REDACTED], and I will be sharing at the protest tomorrow. I will also be listing every slogan we have written on our signs and the chants we plan on shouting in the halls. I will have the open letter and one additional speech sent to you in the morning. Thank you again for all the help and support you have given us.

Chants:

- 1 Free free Palestine, occupation is a crime
- 2 Cease-fire now
- 3 No more hiding no more fear, genocide is crystal clear
- 4 We want justice, you say how? End the siege on Gaza now!
- 5 1, 2, 3, 4 Occupation No More
- 6 The people united will never be defeated

Posters:

Where is your "no justice no peace?"
They tried to bury us they didn't know we were seeds
By any means necessary
Palestine occupied but unconquered
We can't breathe since 1948
Western media lies and children die
Let Gaza live
Stop funding genocide with our tax dollars
Peace in Palestine not Palestine in pieces demand cease fire defend Gaza
To stand with Palestine is to stand with humanity
Gaza Can't Breathe
You don't need to be Muslim to stand for Palestine you just need to be human
10569 how many more? Ceasefire
I believe that we will win
Silence is complicity
Resistance until liberation
We stand with Palestine

The accompanying speeches (below) further used terms like "nakba", "intifada", and "Zionist entity".

The first prime minister of Israel once said "the old will die, and the young will forget." Does it look like we forgot? We will NEVER forget the atrocities committed by the Zionist state against Palestinians. We will NEVER forget how the United States actively supported the propaganda, weapons, and murder. And you all are directly responsible for making sure that no one forgets about the Palestinian cause, that no one forgets that we exist and we will never go away.

We as students understand the revolutionary power of education. The Zionist entity knows that the youth are at the forefront of our resistance, and because of this, youth and student organizers are one of the most targeted groups amongst those in support of Palestinian liberation. Israel and its accomplices in the US continue to repress student mobilization. Through their surveillance, their threats, their blatant attempts to silence us, we have resisted in defiance of their intimidation.

tactics. They know that our movement is growing, more and more students are joining the cause of Palestine. The students at Clarksburg High School do not support genocide!

We MUST use the privilege we have here to speak up. Do not be scared to speak up against injustice. We can all play such an immense role in changing the narrative in this country if we work together. And the narrative IS changing. People are paying attention to the cause, they are paying attention to the atrocities that the Zionist entity is committing. Now is not the time to give up, this is when we need to push even

harder! We need to gather even more energy and resources for Palestine while we have this momentum.

Through their surveillance, their threats, their blatant attempts to silence us, we have resisted in defiance of their intimidation tactics. They know that our movement is growing, more and more students are joining the cause of Palestine. The students at Clarksburg High School do not support genocide!

We MUST use the privilege we have here to speak up. Do not be scared to speak up against injustice. We can all play such an immense role in changing the narrative in this country if we work together. And the narrative IS changing. People are paying attention to the cause, they are paying attention to the atrocities that the Zionist entity is committing. Now is not the time to give up, this is when we need to push even harder! We need to gather even more energy and resources for Palestine while we have this momentum.

I know many of us are tired and want to go back to normal. But how can we be normal when our people are facing genocide? How can we be normal when our representatives are supporting it? Normal does not come after a ceasefire. Normal comes after the total end of the settlements, imprisonment, occupation, and apartheid. Palestinians do not have the ability to be normal, to put down their phones and forget about what is happening. Gazans cannot sleep knowing their death could come at any time. They take shelter knowing that they could be the next target. They have to *search for pieces of their children* to gather together. They cannot do anything except hope that their

family, their children are not next.

We **NEED** to continue to actively support Palestine. We will not sit silently and back down while they take even an **INCH** of our land. We will never give up until Palestine is free, from the river, to the sea.

Good morning everyone. I want to begin by thanking you all for joining us this morning. I know it's early, I know it's cold - your willingness to partake in discomfort shows your dedication to the cause. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Sabrin Niamathullah. I'm a senior here at Clarksburg and also your SGA president. You know, as a senior, I spend a lot of time thinking about my future. I'm visiting and applying to colleges, getting ready to start the next stage of my life and move into adulthood. It's terrifying. As I look into the future, my future, I wish for success, I wish for stability, I wish for happiness. As I look into the future, I am the only thing in focus.

In 1984, the people of Palestine faced what they call the "Nakba" which in Arabic is directly translated to the "catastrophe". The United Nations describes the Nakba as, "the mass displacement and dispossession of Palestinians during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war." and according to Al Jazeera, "at least 750,000 Palestinians from a 1.9 million population were made refugees beyond the borders of the state. Zionist forces...ethnically cleansed and destroyed about 530 villages and cities, and killed about 15,000 Palestinians in a series of mass atrocities....". We all have the privilege of education: on an academic level, we all know what these words mean, what these sentences convey. Yet we *struggle* to understand what that feels like. To be forced to leave your home, your way of life. Looking into the future and hoping, praying, promising that life would soon be better.

In 1987, the people of Palestine led the First Intifada, which in Arabic is directly translated as "to shake off". In retaliation to the longstanding Israeli occupation, the First Intifada was characterized by a series of demonstrations, mass boycotts, civil disobedience, and violent resistance to Israeli forces. Their protest was met by the Israeli Defense Force, killing more than 1,000 Palestinians and injuring, imprisoning, and torturing thousands more. After 5 years, the

****Community Response and Urgent Call to Action****

These incidents have ignited deep concern within the Montgomery County community, prompting a call for swift and decisive action from MCPS officials. MJA, parents, community leaders, and concerned citizens are demanding transparency, accountability, and a thorough investigation into the handling of these antisemitic incidents. MJA estimates that there is, unfortunately, a treasure trove of documentation regarding similar incidents at many other Maryland schools. As such, it is in the public interest that the media take a closer look at these and similar incidents.

MJA further demands that MCPS: 1) investigate the aforementioned incidents and responses thereto, 2) ensure that responses to antisemitic incidents, inclusive of these incidents and going forward, follow the same policy and process taken to address any other form of hate, 3) vigorously investigate outside groups involved in organizing student events to verify that they are not antisemitic ahead of any similar events, and 4) not permit last minute events, such as these walkouts, to proceed without time to review the organizations involved and proposed political language to be used.

For further inquiries or to schedule interviews, please contact:

Maryland Jewish Alliance

MDJewishAlliance@gmail.com
(240) 600-1804

About Maryland Jewish Alliance (“MJA”)

MJA newly formed advocacy group dedicated to combating the rise in antisemitism in Maryland schools and communities. Our mission is to advocate for educating students, staff, and administrators in recognizing and addressing antisemitism; representing the interest of Jewish and Israeli-American voices in focus groups and at Board of Education meetings vis a vis antisemitism.