

7-29-2020

Dear Donna, Fred, and Erin,

We were stunned to find out at the July 28, 2020 Staff Webinar that MISD was thinking about a RIF or “furlough” of bus drivers, and we were appalled that MISD would inform our wonderful bus drivers in this way. We believe using the Staff Webinar to inform our MIEA members that their jobs were in jeopardy was incredibly insensitive to our bus drivers. Did anyone consider what this would feel like if you were on the receiving end of that message? At the very least, our drivers should have been forewarned by their supervisor to prepare them for this message. Instead, in individual conversations last week their supervisor reassured drivers that their jobs were safe.

Additionally, Sally is highly concerned that during her HR weekly meeting, she was never given any sort of forewarning or notice to share with MIEA. That is not in the spirit of collaboration that MIEA has worked so hard to build with MISD. This information should have been shared with MIEA prior to the webinar.

That being said, our MIEA Executive Board believes our bus drivers are an integral part of our school district and MI community; we expect MISD to do the right thing and continue their employment and honor their Letters of Reasonable Assurance received at the end of the 2019-20 school year.

We believe:

- MISD already has the state allocated transportation dollars for 2020-21. This money should be used to pay our drivers and keep them employed during this pandemic.
- “Furlough” does not appear in the contract. MIEA would like clarification on the use of “furlough” with respect to our CBA if this is being considered.
- During our spring closure our drivers stepped up to help with transporting educational materials to students, tutoring students, supporting reading instruction, transporting equipment to our special education student homes and so much more. They supported our community wherever they could. These supports provided by the bus drivers and more will be essential again in the 2020-21 school year.
- Our drivers are members of the MI community. Many of them live here, have families and children in our schools they depend on their jobs to support their families.
- MISD will lose valuable employees who hold Commercial Driver’s License. It is not enough though to just have that document, drivers must also have a school bus endorsement.
- MISD has made a large investment in training our driver instructors and our bus drivers, this investment is lost if they are no longer employed with our District.
- The District can save money by canceling the contract with Metro for the High School. When High School resumes in person, MISD drivers can transport High School Students the remainder of the school year like they have every Wednesday for the last few years.
- Our Bus Drivers for the most part, consider themselves Educators first, bus drivers second. They want to work and are willing to perform any reasonable task provided they are safe. Remote teaching is difficult and our teachers need all the help they can get.
- Because they bring their years of experience, training and commitment in our community to their job every day, our community values our drivers’ knowledge and experience. Our drivers are not replaceable.
- *Losing bus drivers means losing para-educators.* Some of our bus drivers are also para educators. We need all the educators we have to support our students in remote learning.

- Losing our drivers will increase the issues MISD has with equity, as there will be fewer adults to act as a safety net for our most vulnerable students. Every driver *we have is a potential* support to students, families and teachers with remote learning.
- Schools will reopen for in-person instruction, and when it does, if you kick our wonderful drivers to the curb, MISD will intensify the difficulty of finding good drivers for transporting our students.
- MISD has struggled for years to fill these positions and losing drivers now will only make this issue worse.

For all of these reasons and so many more, MIEA believes that MISD will do the right thing for our drivers and the Mercer Island community. Our drivers and MIEA members implore the district to dig deep and find creative solutions that allow all employees to support the educational mission of MISD. Our students are counting on us all to do the right things for them and keeping these valuable members of our education community employed, is the right thing!

Sincerely,

Sally Loeser

and

The Mercer Island Education Association Executive Board

Trina Sherman

Andy Hamp

Valerie Perine

Stephanie John-Lewis

Miguel Guerra-Kerrigan

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