

Dear MPS Colleagues:

Next week marks my second month on the job as superintendent of Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS). These past several weeks I have learned a great deal about our school district, met with many of our dedicated educators and staff and listened to our students and their families about their hopes for themselves and their expectations for our district. While I'm continuing to listen and learn from everyone I meet, I have now been able to identify some initial changes that would make a significant difference in the lives and experiences of the students we serve.

There is unbounded potential in our schools, but we must be willing to acknowledge some hard truths. First and foremost, academic outcomes for our students are not where they should be. We must have the courage to make changes that will benefit our students urgently. It is also true that where we are today is by no means a reflection of the talented educators and staff who work in MPS, in fact it is quite the opposite. I believe our challenges are rooted in broken systems and structures, not people.

With students and families at the center of my decision making and after consultation with our leadership team, I am announcing some changes to how staff in our academics office are deployed throughout the district. We expect to have close to 80 or more vacant teaching positions in our district by the start of the next school year. This is due to the teacher shortage that is happening across the nation, and normal attrition from retirements and staff departures. To address this, I have asked our Chief of Academics, Jennifer Mims-Howell, to begin a process that will place around 40 certified teachers, currently working in our central office, in classrooms throughout the district. To do this with equity and transparency a total of 181 positions in our academics office will be "excessed." Staff impacted by this decision were notified today. About 140 of those positions will be immediately reposted, and existing staff will be able to apply for those positions. Many of these positions are classified as academic coaches and literacy specialists.

Just before I arrived in Milwaukee, the Governor's Office issued an operational and academic audit of MPS. The changes we are making with our academic team are in direct response to items highlighted in that audit.

I know change is always hard, and that not everyone will agree with this decision. I am committed to ensuring everyone on the academics team that is impacted by these changes has the opportunity to be considered for a job of their choosing and I am confident that they will navigate through this process with the same dedication, professionalism, and leadership that they have always demonstrated. Again, this change is rooted in creating new systems and structures to benefit students and schools.

Our students deserve highly effective teachers at the head of their classrooms and this change can make that possible for more of them. I also believe that this will give us the opportunity to address how our central office academic support is structured and how it can most effectively lead to change in our schools. And yes, this will also provide us with cost-savings that can be

used to invest back in our schools – not our central office. This will include additional support and resources for embedded teacher professional development and school-level instructional leadership. More details on this will be provided through the budget process in the weeks to come.

Next week I expect that I will be able to share my proposed leadership team structure with you, which will guide the operational structure of our central office moving forward. I am excited to share this with you soon.

I am grateful to be doing this work with all of you and look forward to continuing to hear and learn from you about how we can continue to make positive changes for each of the students we have the privilege of serving.

In partnership,

Brenda Cassellius, EdD
Superintendent