

June 4, 2024

“The move to the Southdale/Moorland neighborhood was a hard-fought equity correction. To see students’ lives so unprotected and disrupted is crushing.”

- Southside Stakeholder/Parent/Educator

Introduction

We, the parents, families, and caregivers of children attending Southside Elementary School, present to you concerns and issues that have lingered, worsened, and been ignored over the last four years. For several reasons, we are disturbed and saddened by the indifference and lack of urgency being exhibited by the District administration.

First, Allis/Southside serves a historically marginalized student population. According to the [2022-2023 Allis/Southside Report Card](#), approximately 75 percent of students identified as “economically disadvantaged” with approximately 70 percent of students identifying as Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino. An MMSD school with a wealthier and Whiter student population would not have been disregarded for so long, if at all.

Second, Allis/Southside is one of seven MMSD’s schools designated as a “Community School.” A “Community School” is supposed to be a place where the assets, voices, and experiences of all stakeholders (students, parents/families, staff, and community members) are lifted, respected, and valued. It is supposed to be a welcoming place where resources are harnessed to support the needs of the neighborhood so that its students and families can thrive. Regrettably, the support and resources have not materialized.

Third, we are aware of former Southside families that have left due to the same concerns and issues we are currently facing. Many of us have been asked, “Why don’t you just send your children to another school?” Leaving Southside is certainly an option. However, we issue this complaint with the clarity that each of us is invested not only in our children’s wellbeing, but in the wellbeing of all children attending Southside. We are friends, family, and neighbors of the Southside community, and removing our children will not resolve the concerns and/or issues. We want and demand that *all* of our children receive the education that they deserve.

Finally, we have been repeatedly disempowered and denied our rightful place at the table, when decisions are made that have had a direct impact on us, our children, and our community. For example, during the summer of 2020, Candace Terrell was installed

as principal by Ms. Carlettra Stanford (an Associate Superintendent at the time) without serving in an interim capacity. Ms. Stanford failed to seek stakeholders' input and feedback on what we desired and were looking for in our next school leader. The decision to silence our voices, set the tone for the current administration and has had a detrimental effect on us, our children, and community. Under similar circumstances, would Ms. Stanford have used her power and authority to disenfranchise stakeholders at Van Hise, Randall, or Franklin (elementary schools with vastly different demographics than Allis/Southside)? The answer is a resounding, "No."

In contrast to our experience, the MMSD [Principal Screening and Selection Process](#) details one step of community engagement requirements:

"The Community Panel will be selected by the School-based Leadership Team and will comprise staff, parents, teachers, community members, and potentially students who will provide the Superintendent with a summary of perceived strengths and areas of growth for each candidate. "

While we recognize that other schools may have challenges, the current state of affairs at Southside is beyond concernable - it is at an epic level of untenability. With Candace Terrell and Annabel Torres at the helm, Southside will continue to run afoul and eventually sink into the abyss. For this reason, we will no longer allow or tolerate our opinions and voices to be suppressed.

Issuing a Call to Action

Today, we issue a call to action to redress the years of unresolved concerns and issues that have plagued Allis/Southside under the leadership of Candace Terrell (4 years) and Annabel Torres (2 years). At the May 20, 2024 MMSD School Board meeting, it was revealed that multiple stakeholders have filed complaints with the District administration, but to no avail. Furthermore, for three years running, Allis/Southside, which serves a highly marginalized population, has experienced the highest staff turnover rate in the District. As a result, some students have not had a regular teacher for three consecutive years. Studies have shown that high turnover rates systematically disadvantage students of color from low-income families. Be aware: staff are not fleeing their students. Rather, they are fleeing a toxic climate and poor working conditions created by Candace Terrell and Annabel Torres. Both administrators are unfit to lead any school.

For the safety and wellbeing of children attending Southside, Candace Terrell and Annabel Torres must be removed immediately from their duties due to their inability to: manage and lead effectively, develop positive schoolwide systems of support, establish

a positive school climate and culture, engage in open dialogue, and cultivate trusting relationships/partnerships with all stakeholders.

Turning a blind eye to children being harmed and allowing problems at Allis/Southside to fester, is unconscionable. Therefore, we would be remiss if we did not name and hold accountable individuals who are or were directly responsible for supervising Candace's and Annabel's performance. Ms. Carlettra Stanford (Assistant Superintendent of School Leadership) served as Candace's direct supervisor from 2020-2023 (3 years) and Annabel Torres' during the 2022-2023 school year. Ms. Stanford continues to support the Administration from behind the scenes, with Candace boasting, "Carlettra has my back." Currently, Candace and Annabel are under the direct purview of Ms. Chelsey Tubbs (Associate Superintendent). Ms. Tubbs has witnessed first-hand Black and Brown students (mainly males) being subjected to excessive discipline. But Ms. Tubbs never intervened nor came to the students' rescue. Ms. Stanford and Ms. Tubbs have failed at protecting children and fulfilling their responsibilities and obligations to Allis/Southside's stakeholders, the community, and the tenets of a "Community School." Thus, we strongly feel that Ms. Stanford and Ms. Tubbs should also be relieved from their roles and responsibilities for gross negligence and for putting the Administration ahead of students' needs and safety.

Following, we have outlined concerns and issues related to the psychological and physical safety of students, exclusionary discipline, loss of instruction, staff turnover, the dismantling of family engagement and community partnership and poor communication.

Psychological and Physical Safety

We believe that the high levels of chronic unsafe and disruptive behaviors of some students is a symptom of an environment made unsafe by inconsistent discipline procedures, lack of sustained relationships with teachers, lack of seasoned teachers and staff, and unclear directives from Administration. We do not blame our students or our families for these behaviors. Similarly, we are not requesting a more punitive approach to discipline, but rather a more holistic and proactive approach to safety. The schoolwide environment at Southside Elementary can be characterized as chaotic, disruptive, loud, and unsafe. Physical fights are common, often with no adult intervention. Serious altercations in classrooms have gone viral on social media.

We understand that at many schools these same behaviors occur, but we believe that what distinguishes Southside is how very commonplace these behaviors and events are, and how inadequate the Administration's response is. It has become clear that many of us experience huge gaps in the Administration's follow-through with regard to

reporting and notifying us when dangerous behavior happens. Here are some examples from our children's experiences and our observations:

Physical violence:

- Children of all ages regularly return home with bruises, red marks, scratches, swelling, and other physical marks without any communication from school.
- Children regularly experience chairs and desks, chromebooks, scissors, books and more being thrown at students and staff.
- One parent volunteer describes disruptions causing entire classrooms to vacate to the hallways for extended periods, "My son's class has to sit on the floor in the hallway of his classroom because students are so violent and have destroyed the classroom. So much so that the other students and teacher are not safe."
- One child witnessed two students fighting during class, one body slamming another, while the child on the bottom's lips turned purple and said he couldn't breathe.
- At recess, a student was tackled and choked without any staff intervention and no call home. The parents found out from the student and witnessed red marks on the neck.
- Multiple students have shared stories of abuse/violations happening while using the bathrooms.
- Fights are so common in the hallways that some students have reported fearing leaving their classrooms to use the bathroom.
- Repeated instances of real and toy weapons being brought into the classroom environment, with very little, if any, follow up with parents to ensure our children are safe.
- Ms. Terrell and Ms. Torres are not following up with parents after bullying or physical violence happens. There is concern that the administration is not following up with families, and is not officially reporting serious incidents. This lack of response is seen in other offices as well including the Health office and other support staff that have responsibilities to report injuries and threats to families.

Psychological bullying:

- Regular occurrence of name calling, body shaming, out-of-group derogatory terms such as the b-word, r-word, the n-word, homophobic slurs, etc., so much so that the culture is characterized by this type of interaction.
- Administrators themselves have been overheard using slurs and profanity during school events and in front of students and families.
- Sexual harassment, sexually explicit teasing, and bullying are commonplace and often not addressed or insufficiently addressed.

- Younger students report bullying from older students when multiple grade levels are together at lunch or during gym class.
- Students with IEP's are often unsupported due to long-term staffing shortages. Without appropriate staffing and resources, unsupported students are re-traumatized, misunderstood or dismissed and excluded from educational access.
- Administration consistently assigns the Cross Categorical teachers and Special Ed Assistants, who should be supporting students with IEPs, to instead cover for staffing vacancies in other areas. This results in legally mandated IEP services and supports not being provided.

Environmental Safety Concerns:

- Family volunteers present during fire drills have observed chaos, with children running out of their classrooms at once, barrelling down the staircases, yelling and running into the parking lot with little adult oversight. One parent waited with a group of 4th grade students for 3-4 minutes while they searched for their shoes to be able to evacuate the building. Another parent observed an over 11 minute evacuation time. Yet another parent came to the school and overheard the Administration commenting that they had no current written evacuation plan.
- Students report that all drills – fire, tornado, lockdown, etc. – are chaotic, poorly planned, and protocols are not followed.
- Families report many personal things have been stolen from cubbies or destroyed during behavior outbursts (medical devices, glasses, airtags, extra clothing, food and more). Students have only open cubbies, not lockers, and the cubbies are not secure. We regularly see dysregulated kids tearing apart a whole bank of cubbies and their contents.
- In addition, dysregulated behavior in the hallways leads to actual school equipment, fixtures, doors and bathrooms being in disarray or damaged; this damage creates safety concerns in a school for young children. The school is regularly a chaotic and disrupted environment simply due to damage from behavior outbursts.
- The facility itself is too small, including the playgrounds. This puts a burden on students and staff, requiring much more coordination to accommodate each other in a crowded facility in order to keep it clean, safe, orderly, and accessible.
- Students and families were promised a rooftop garden space; however, it is not safe or accessible and therefore no one can access it. There is no garden per se, but a small area of landscaping.
- Student pick-up and drop off for students who walk to and from home (“walkers”) was designated to the NE corner of the lot on E. Badger Rd. Leaving school and meeting family members in this system requires children to cross a high traffic,

industrial driveway. In the mornings, there is no one supervising the driveway. Visibility is terrible when the buses are parked in front of the school so cars cannot see children crossing the driveway until the very last moment. Staff and families both have complained that the traffic plan is unsafe on a daily basis, but it remains unchanged since the beginning of the school year.

- During afternoon dismissal in the walker area, Ms. Torres supervises and is required to manage cars pulling into the rear lot, as well as actually directing bus and car traffic on E. Badger Rd. Regular afternoon meetings and other activities occupy Ms. Torres instead of staffing this role. Untrained substitute staff often fill in without radios, training or direction. Parents have needed to step in to keep the children safe by physically standing in the path of vehicles. Kids run out into Badger Rd, in between parked cars and children are released to parents in a car in the middle of a busy road in direct view of Ms. Torres.
- Badger Rd. is an industrial thoroughfare, with heavy afternoon traffic. The parked cars and bus loading zone have created a narrow street passage that many drivers still navigate at unsafe speeds. There is very little road signage indicating the school zone.
- The Moorland Rd crosswalks are also very unsafe, with no signage or indication that it is a school zone. Crossing Moorland Road is dangerous even with a crossing guard. Parents have seen cars nearly hit the crossing guard as they stand in the middle of the crosswalk. Cars travel at very high speeds downhill on Moorland and there is no signage indicating they are approaching children crossing the road. Cars dangerously pass children on bikes at 35+ mph on a daily basis.

General Wellness Concerns:

- A common experience of a Southside Elementary student is persistent headaches (due to periods of excessive noise), stomachaches, anxiety, and fear.
- These symptoms are often associated with trauma, and our concern is that the school environment itself is causing ongoing trauma for children.
- We need to highlight that peer conflict, violence, bullying and more have direct impacts on the children involved. But many students who witness both the violence and the punitive approaches administration takes also feel deep impacts.
- Opportunities for children from diverse racial and class backgrounds to build community are being hindered by the lack of modeling of appropriate conflict resolution, the regular and unchecked use of gender and racial slurs, and a traumatic environment.
- Children report frequent visits to the nurse's office to escape classroom chaos. Some families shared this happening over successive years.

- As will be discussed later in the complaint, inconsistent and unpredictable discipline has left many of our children fearing punishments and uncertain what the limits and boundaries are because they are so inconsistently enforced.
- The types of discipline employed (public shaming and exclusion) have left many of our children struggling with issues related to self-esteem and self-worth.

Inconsistent, Disproportionate, and Exclusionary Discipline

Families and children both describe a confusing and inconsistent disciplinary system. It is at times punitive and at times permissive, with very little consistency across different school areas. As you saw above, physical fighting, bullying, and threatening behaviors are commonplace at Southside. Because administrators are unable and/or unwilling to intervene in physical altercations, our children have had to defend themselves. This is perhaps why so many of our children are being scolded and punished for self-defense. We want our children to be accountable for their behavior, but this is very hard to achieve when they are forced to physically defend themselves on a daily basis.

- Students report being threatened with not being allowed to participate in graduation ceremonies, with exclusionary discipline for days, weeks, and months.
- Many of us have asked that our children not be subject to the "walkers circle" because it does not teach appropriate behavior and is instead a public punishment that is shaming.
- It's devastating to learn that some of our children are spending up to **several months** in "buddy classrooms". This means they are spending hours unsupervised on chromebook time rather than being actually held accountable, or given opportunities to correct their behaviors and learn alternatives.
- There are various "community service" punishments, such as students being told to clean the cafeteria or to help out in a younger classroom, to make up for misbehavior. These punishments remove children from their owed instructional time and/or recess, are often degrading, and are reminiscent of the carceral system. They do little to correct the behaviors of concern.
- A number of families report their child was excluded from attending school events due to behavior but parents had no reports or communication from school about the behavior.
- Exclusionary discipline and a lack of alternatives means children are not learning problem solving and conflict resolution skills as there is no coherent teaching or modeling among staff. Our children should not lose access to education as a punishment. Students are in school to learn.
- Exclusionary discipline also means that students with IEPs are not receiving their services while they are being disciplined.

- It's not just the punishments that are concerning; it is the inconsistent, unpredictable, and developmentally inappropriate ways in which they are handed out. Many children are being punished long after the problematic behavior occurred, so much so that they are often not even aware anymore of why they are being punished. Threats of punishment happen frequently, and are only sometimes followed through on.
- Some of our children carry constant anxiety about things being taken away from them (such as field trips) because they don't feel they understand clearly what the rules, limits, and consequences are, and when they will be enforced. When children experience these punitive consequences, the teachable moment is often long gone, and they are simply left with the feeling of lowered self-esteem, lack of trust in adults, confusion, and anxiety.
- Recently, family members with kids in classrooms with daily conflict and disruption report a renewed focus on behavior plans and increased staffing. While this could be seen as a positive step, it is being implemented in the last 2 weeks of the school year, after many months of serious issues going unaddressed.
- In spite of increasing staff presence in the classrooms, Ms. Terrell and Ms. Torres are not directly involved, and have not been available to monitor the impact of these changes. At this point, some classrooms have seen so many months of disrupted and unsafe patterns that these efforts appear to be more for appearances than effective teacher support, coaching, and systemic change.
- A parent, whose Black daughter is frequently subjected to Southside's exclusionary discipline and the ire of Ms. Terrell, recently asked Ms. Terrell, "Would you like it if your own daughters were treated the way that [name omitted] was treated?" Ms. Terrell replied with an emphatic, "No."
- **Fact:** Ms. Terrell often speaks about growing up in the 53206 ZIP code - a highly marginalized community in the city of Milwaukee. The 53206 ZIP code has the highest incarceration rate for Black men in the United States. Given her experience and background, why is Ms. Terrell adultifying, criminalizing, and treating children (Black and Brown males, especially) at Southside like they are attending a penal institution? Ms. Terrell is betraying Black and Brown children and the parents, families, and caretakers that leave their children in her care by perpetuating the "School-to- Prison-Pipeline." Ms. Terrell, who is uniquely situated, is supposed to be uplifting children, not breaking them down.
- We want to point out that Ms. Torres' own children attend MMSD's schools. The schools her children attend are supportive, absent administrative threats, indifference, and policies/practices that criminalize students. While Ms. Torres' children get to enjoy a supportive, restorative, and stress-free learning environment, children left in Ms. Torres' care at Southside are subjected to daily

chaos and confusion, lack of support, and punitive measures. Rest assured, if Ms. Torres' children were being treated in a similar manner that she treats children at Southside, she would be outraged.

- We wonder, how can Ms. Terrell and Ms. Torres as parents, with a good conscience, cause harm to other parents' children, while at the same time knowing their own children are being nurtured, well-cared for, and safe?
- Our children would benefit from a school environment that is safe, stable, consistent, and full of resources for social/emotional learning.

Instructional Loss - Denial of Equal Access to Education

We believe that the combination of inconsistent schoolwide expectations and discipline, unaddressed student behavior issues, and teacher and staff turnover, have led to an environment in which learning cannot happen. We understand that this is not happening in every classroom, but we believe it to be commonplace and a significant part of the Southside school experience. We encourage you to look beyond the standardized test scores for Southside, as they *do not* reflect our experiences. We are tired of being told that because our schoolwide test scores show growth, there is no cause for concern, as we are witnessing many causes for concern.

- Children often talk about “not being able to finish a lesson” because of behavioral disruptions. Parents have seen teachers become exasperated and overwhelmed when trying to teach, calling behavior support staff for help.
- In discussions with families, Ms. Terrell and Ms. Torres blame individual teachers for these issues and are rarely seen being directly involved in providing support or coaching that could help teachers who may be struggling.
- One parent volunteer described their experience as, “Volunteering is more like being a bodyguard than helping the teacher with simple classroom work/instruction.” Family members report being compelled to regularly physically block fights and protect children from thrown objects, fighting, and harm.
- Largely due to vacant support staff positions, behavior support response often takes a long time to arrive, or never responds. Support staff clearly are overloaded with calls on a daily basis, and teachers are left alone with unsafe and serious behaviors on top of instruction.
- When students share that the classroom environment is stressful or so loud it leads to headaches, among the only offered solutions are noise canceling headphones or the option to leave the classroom on extended breaks. It appears Administration cannot guarantee functioning instructional spaces.
- Young children who cannot work in loud and disruptive rooms often respond by leaving the room. One parent reports, “When my child leaves the classroom for a break to calm down, he is reprimanded by both Annabel and Candace for being outside of the classroom on several occasions. He was then in trouble and was

not heard by either as to why he needed a break in the first place. They were very dismissive of him.”

- Most English Language Learners (ELLs) receive English language support instruction in different ways, including dedicated support staff with focused instruction. Many ELL students have gone without the necessary language support that they are entitled to receive by Federal law. Frequent subbing and reassigning of language support staff to other roles as well as leadership incompetence have impeded the delivery of targeted language instruction and other ESL supports.

Staff Turnover and Long-Term Vacancies

We realize that the issue of teacher and staff shortages is a District-wide issue. However, we believe that not only is Southside’s teacher turnover, long-term position vacancy, and substitute teacher coverage worse than other schools, we believe that it was/is preventable. Marginalized students need and deserve the most qualified and experienced teachers in front of them. From the time that Ms. Terrell joined the Southside Administration, parents and students have watched many beloved highly-qualified and experienced teachers and staff members leave. In the words of one staff member who left mid year, "This is a staff exodus, not a staff shortage." It will take years, if not decades, to recover what we lost when so many of our highly-qualified and experienced staff and teachers left.

Mid-year departures are hugely disruptive to relationships and to building a cohesive classroom community. Moreover, many Southside students experience this loss of adult relationship as a real loss. Finally, Southside is not able to benefit from any year-to-year momentum in its programming as staff leaves so often that there is little for children to look ahead/look forward to besides a revolving door of long term substitute teachers.

- Staff turnover is rapid enough to disrupt effective teaching about emotional regulation schoolwide. Our children are moving through elementary school without seeing or learning how to effectively resolve conflicts.
- One parent observed (and many others share the experience) that in 5 years at the school, their child has never had a teacher with more than 2 years of teaching experience, and 3 out of 5 of their teachers have already left Southside. This is true for classroom teachers as well as Specials teachers.
- The number of vacant positions has fluctuated, but for much of the year Southside had 9 vacant positions. This is about 12% less than full staffing. The impact on our children of not having caring adults in these positions can’t be overstated.
- On Friday, May 31st, there were 11 vacancies posted on [MMSD’s career website](#). We believe this may be underreported. Currently, Southside has the

highest number of vacancies. If history dictates, the number of vacancies will increase.

- As aforementioned, Allis/Southside serves a highly marginalized group. It is vital that students have highly qualified and experienced teachers in front of them. Instead, as a result of the exodus, students are being taught by inexperienced teachers in their first and second year of the profession.
- The cohort of students that is currently in 5th grade has not had a regular classroom teacher OR a regular Cross Categorical teacher since 3rd grade. In 3rd, 4th and 5th grades, 3 different teachers left midyear because of the failed leadership and toxic work environment created by Ms. Terrell and Ms. Torres. The vacancies created by those abrupt departures were then covered by the CC teachers, which meant they could not provide the Special Education services mandated by these students' IEPs. There are at least two 5th grade students at Southside with IEPs who literally cannot read. This is a direct consequence of the failed leadership's ability to retain staff, making it impossible for these students to get the specialized instruction that is their right.
- Staff shortages have led to untrained Educational Assistants being assigned by Administration to assume the role and responsibility of a licensed classroom teacher.

Dismantling Family Engagement and Community Partnerships

As mentioned earlier, Southside is one of seven identified “Community Schools” in MMSD. According to the [MMSD Community Schools page](#),

“A Community School is a welcoming and inclusive place that builds on the assets of the community to help serve the identified needs of the students, families and community through well integrated and coordinated, strategic partnerships.”

Most families don't report engagement like this, or even know we've been designated a Community School. In fact, families consistently reflect that we do not feel welcome at school either during instruction or after hours at events. The inconsistent and broken communication Administration has established is an obstacle to fulfilling the promise of being a Community School. Compounding these issues is the disruption of community partnerships that Frank Allis had in place over the years, as well as the ongoing lack of cooperation with existing community partners in our new location.

- Families report being unable to schedule meetings, get responses to emails, or have phone calls returned when reaching out to Administration for volunteering, with questions or with serious concerns.

- Badger Rock Middle School staff report consistent difficulties scheduling meetings and establishing working relationships with Southside Administrators.
- Rooted, the school garden education organization, and Badger Rock Neighborhood Center are both housed in the same building as Southside. Staff from both organizations report over a year of attempts to reach out to Southside/Frank Allis Administration with little success. Rooted and Badger Rock staff began attempts to meet while Frank Allis Elementary was planning the transition to the new building before construction.
- Southside staff and families deserve to benefit from access to incredible community events and networks already in place via Badger Rock Middle School, Badger Rock Community Center, and Rooted. Partnership with these organizations would mean access to food pantries, community gardens, outdoor education and many other resources for Southside students and families, many of whom experience food insecurity on a regular basis.
- Community engagement has suffered due to rapid turnover and long-term absences in many areas of support staff, especially Family and Community Engagement and Social Work staff. For 3 years in a row, engagement staff have been kept from developing and maintaining bonds with families. This was a result of new positions being created, new employees hired and not provided resources, job description or training. During these 2 years, we have seen a series of excellent staff members in these roles being placed on disciplinary leave or resigning mid-year.
- Although Family-Community-Alliance (“FCA”) is our primary way of being involved as partners in our children’s education, the meetings are inconsistent. At times they have been canceled at the last minute, and parents are typically notified only the day before, or the day of, to confirm whether meetings are happening. The meetings themselves offer little room for discussion and are mainly a presentation by the Administration of current test scores and survey results.
- The newly formed Badger Rock Neighborhood Association (BRNA), which serves the neighborhoods surrounding the school, has repeatedly reached out for help organizing a meeting space for its formation. As a result of disorganized school responses, the BRNA was delayed for 5 months in reserving space to meet.
- The Neighborhood Association has offered to help promote school events to the wider community and link families with school resources, but there has been no meaningful interaction with any school staff.
- Upon assuming leadership and even recently, Administration canceled regular community events that were popular, inclusive, and well-attended for years. Here are examples of popular community events and school activities that have been

discontinued and not replaced: The Back to School Party in Southdale Park, the Fun Run, Disney musicals, CarnivAllis, Friday clubs, and more.

- The events that replaced these traditions are either “earned” through schoolwide behavior incentives that are inconsistently monitored (and thus exclusive), or like Mercado/Carnival, charge money to participate. Any schoolwide event that charges for participation is inaccessible to most families in a school with a high unhoused population and 75 percent of families identified by DPI as “Low income”.
- One parent shared this about the most recent school event, Carnaval: “This event was not advertised as a fundraiser, and cost us \$35 to participate (tickets and food). If it had been advertised as a fundraiser I would feel better about it...but general participation should be free, but maybe a special thing like the dunk tank should have purchased tickets.”
- Another parent spent over \$75 on tickets at Carnaval so that she could share with neighbors who couldn’t afford to eat the food provided or pay for their children to bounce in the bouncy house. This event is intended to be a celebration of Latin American culture, and many Southside Latino families couldn’t afford to participate.
- Southside community dinners are not publicized well, so only those who are connected with the school in some way (parents who are also staff members) are able to be aware of the event. In addition, working-class families are often asked to donate catered meals to school-wide events like taco night or soup dinners.

Poor Communication

There are major fractures in the relationships between many families and their school, and significant barriers to parent participation and community engagement. On an interpersonal level, nearly all of the parents and caretakers in this group have had negative experiences in attempting to communicate with Administration, either due to Administration’s evasiveness or their inappropriate attempts at addressing concerns. On a systemic level, communications about family events, including Family-Community-Alliance meetings, have come as short as the day of the meeting or event. There is no up-to-date school calendar, and parents are often unaware of school events occurring that week, or even that day.

There is an overwhelming feeling among parents that we simply don’t know what’s going on at school. We don’t know about school events, about staffing changes, programming, curriculum, and we don’t know when our children are experiencing bullying, academic struggles, health concerns, or even physical injuries while at school. Here are more examples of what we experience related to communication with Administration:

- Both Administrators are known for not acknowledging, greeting, or engaging with parents as we enter the building, participate in school events, or call the office.
- During family events at the school, Ms. Terrell is often absent during most of the event, and when she is present, she tends to engage only with a small group of Southside staff. Ms. Torres similarly doesn't greet families or engage in widespread relationship building during these events.
- The Family Community Alliance is a parent group largely run and organized by administration. The FCA meetings have been inconsistent, badly noticed and often canceled or changed at the last minute. These issues got much worse with the mid-year resignation of the Family Engagement staff.
- At recent FCA meetings, Ms. Torres evades questions and speaks dismissively towards parents. Ms. Terrell attends only during the last few minutes, if at all, and makes little effort to greet or speak with parents.
- Incorrect dates sent out on multiple communications. The FCA meeting dates for March, April, and May were incorrect on emails. Only after contacting the school did we get the correct dates.
- There is no parent-facing school calendar that is kept up to date by staff, leaving each event to be advertised in newsletters and flyers that are inconsistent.
- Significantly, many parents/caregivers have taken time away from work in order to attempt to communicate about and participate in their children's education. To be repeatedly rebuffed creates a significant barrier in a community where most caregivers have to keep a job.
- This year has seen poor communication and promotion of school events, especially those held during the school day. It's been unclear if parents are being asked to attend an event or if it is for students only. For example with the Winter and Spring Concerts, there was no indication in school emails that these were open to family members.
- Both Administrators are known for not returning emails, even when the topics addressed in the emails are significant safety concerns, including dangerous car pick-up lines or classroom incidents that led to injury.
- In another case, Ms. Terrell pulled a parent away from the community dinner to meet about their concerns, rather than making herself available at a separate time.
- Multiple parents have experienced scheduling a meeting with Ms. Terrell about significant safety concerns which she did not show up for. When able to arrange meetings, family members report having concerns disregarded and dismissed. One parent reports that after pushing for meetings about safety concerns, they were told that a brief encounter in the hallway constituted a meeting.

- Common experiences include being told that bullying or inappropriate sexual/gender comments are “boys being boys” or similar, or that “ we need to get a handle on the teasing”.
- A common concern among parents is that submitting concerns or complaints about culture and climate to administration might result in retaliation either against family or the students themselves. Especially vocal family members have noted that their children are treated with more suspicion, sarcasm, or report being completely ignored by Ms. Terrell at school. Some family members have shared that after they submitted complaints, their children were given more severe punitive discipline.
- Families last year reported asking teachers what could be done about persistent bullying and violence in the classroom and that the teacher implored them not to write Ms. Terrell or she would retaliate against the teacher.
- This risk of retaliation against families and staff is one of the most common concerns and has been a major barrier to families who want to voice concerns to any level of MMSD.
- After the School Board meeting during which many Southside staff members expressed their frustrations with Administration, Ms. Terrell emailed a group of parents (not all parents) and asked them to communicate their support of her to the School Board. It was not lost on those parents that she seemed completely unable to respond to any emails about their children’s education or safety, but had taken the time to petition for their support when concerns about her ineffective leadership became public.

Note: District-level administrators have not been receptive to listening to or addressing our concerns.

However, hours before the MMSD School Board meeting on May 20, 2024, - the day stakeholders went public about what was occurring behind the closed doors at Allis/Southside - parents that were scheduled to make public comments, received a call from Ms. Chelsey Tubbs. Ms. Tubbs informed the parents that she had followed up with Candace Terrell and Annabel Torres about concerns they were expressing. Ms. Tubbs offered to talk through other problems, if needed. Neither parent recalls ever reaching out to or talking to Ms. Tubbs. We suspect that Ms. Tubbs learned that the parents would be speaking at the Board meeting, and therefore reached out in an attempt to get ahead of any potential fallout from the Board presentations. However, the disingenuous attempt was too little, too late.

It is disturbing that over the last four years, Ms. Carlettra Stanford has not reached out to any of us to hear our concerns either. Ms. Stanford’s apathy and indifference has

allowed the mistreatment of students at Allis/Southside to flourish unchecked. If corrective action had been taken four years ago when the concerns and issues first surfaced, many children (especially Black and Brown) may have been spared the physical, emotional, educational, and mental harm and trauma.

Parents, families, and caregivers are often left to pick up the pieces and work to rebuild their children's self-esteem and self-worth. No child should be subjected to a chaotic and carceral education. Children deserve a learning environment where they can learn, thrive, and flourish.

Conclusion

The experiences of Southside students, families and caregivers over the last four years clearly show the systemic failure of Ms. Terrell's and Ms. Torres' leadership. This administration has shown that they are unwilling to collaborate with families or community partners in the interest of academic progress and the overall wellbeing of students and caregivers. When Ms. Terrell and Ms. Torres refuse to even meet with families, it is impossible to work toward solutions for the complicated situations facing our children and our school.

With the school in such turmoil with staffing turnover, families have lost the connections that they'd built over years with certain staff members. This, in turn, makes it difficult for families to trust that school is a good place. The Southside school community and our students deserve a principal and assistant principal who are committed to providing a safe learning environment where families are welcomed and kids can truly learn and thrive. Ms. Terrell and Ms. Torres have demonstrated that they are either unwilling or incapable of doing so.

As caregivers and family members, we do not come forward with this complaint lightly. Many of us are aware of retaliatory behaviors that have been directed at staff at Southside Elementary and are concerned that such behaviors will be directed at our students for voicing our concerns. It was only after sharing our stories with each other and seeing both the amount and severity of concerns that it became clear that this retaliation is already occurring and needs to be ended for the safety of all students at Southside.

Family Testimonies

[Parent Narrative - Brenda Loera and child](#)

[Parent Narrative - Andrea Shorter](#)

[Parent Narrative - Anonymous](#) * anonymous by request

[Parent Narrative - Kaylin Golden](#)

[Parent Narrative - Rachel Woodley](#)

[Parent Narrative - Burnett Reed](#)

[Parent Narrative - Courtney Konieczko and Kevin Konieczko](#)

[Parent Narrative - Caitlin Yunis](#)

Demands

WE the parents, families, and caregivers of students at Allis/Southside, DEMAND the following actions be taken by the District:

- The removal of Candace Terrell as Principal of Southside Elementary School.
- The removal of Annabel Torres as Assistant Principal of Southside Elementary School.
- Candace Terrell nor Annabel Torres should be reassigned to another MMSD school nor allowed to hold building or district level administrative positions.
- View our complaint in the same vein as the General Practice complaint filed by twenty-four former and current Southside staff. Our complaint should be assessed by an impartial third-party and used as additional evidence in the General Practice complaint.
- Empower and lift the voices of all Southside stakeholders in the selection of a new building leader, adhere to [MMSD policies](#) for Principal Screening and Selection (including a school-based interview, community survey and panel.)
- Act immediately to improve school and student safety and community engagement:
 - Agree to a timely and clear action plan to include specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound goals.
 - Update and publish all building safety plans, including: Traffic Safety, Fire Safety, and Evacuation Plans
 - Implement a schoolwide Positive Behavior System, including multi-tiered systems of support, trauma-centered care, consent-based SELS curriculum, and dismantling current punitive/exclusionary practices.

- Publish policies for Admin communication, follow-up, and family meetings.
- Rebuild and repair, with all Southside stakeholders (students, families, and staff), trust that was damaged and lost by ensuring that concerns and feedback are heard, valued, and taken seriously at the building and district and the central office.

Southside’ families and community members care and want to see action.

Signed,

Rachel Gosda	Hunter Gosda	Brenda Loera	Daniela Loera
Rachel Woodley	Donald Woodley	Jose Lopez	Rodolfo Loera
Christopher Bruno	Sarah Chronquist	Vitalino Rodriguez	Victoria Vázquez
Josh Jenkins	Sylvia Boomsma	Nate Rolling	Rebecca Mullee
Kaylyn Golden	Caitlin Yunis	Kevin Konieczko	Jessica Bragg
Matthew Mullee	Kelly Ellis	Amber Kuter	Angela Richards
Tara Fleming	Albert Amos	Leonard Henderson	Antonio Amos
Laura Boomsma	Nicholas Camp	Aimee Beaumont	Juanita Fenne
Matthew Johnson	Kari Johnson	Mario Loera	Kevin Peralta
Jennifer Adams	Makeya Mack	Josh Hoover	Daniel Leal
Tracy Cunnigan	Chelsea Claudio	Katie David	Desiree Millard
Aniyah Jefferson	Robin Peden	Michael Moore	Sarah Morgan
Cora Sivad	Burnett D Reed	Tamaira Reed	Kristine Nadolski
Cynthia Amos	Cassandra Davis	Terrance Moore	Bernice Amos
Victoria Amos	Laila Jenkins	Antjuan Weathers	Staci Amato
Yolanda Edwards	Rosa Rivera		
Jasmine Loera-Espinoza	Courtney Konieczko	Andrea Shorter- Amos	Katherine Boomsma