

Speaking Up for Every Child – Monte Sano Elementary

After being under a federal desegregation order for over fifty years, the Huntsville City School District (HCS) has spent the last two years tirelessly working to gain unitary status and be released from the court order. During the past year the school system has held community forums and both regular and special called board meetings in addition to participating in a two-day federal hearing regarding the school system's student assignment plan (zone lines). Throughout this process, members of the Monte Sano Elementary PTA have actively participated in the process and shared this information with the larger school community so that parents can be informed advocates for their children.

Last January when HCS first unveiled their student assignment (zoning) plan, they held a series of "Community Conversations" to share with the public more information about their plan and other factors that would set the school system on the path to achieving unitary status. The Monte Sano Elementary PTA communicated information about these meetings as well as specific details of how the plan would affect MSES through the school's e-newsletter for two consecutive weeks. Members of the PTA also attended these conversations in order to gain knowledge to share with other Monte Sano parents.

According to the Department of Justice (DOJ)'s student assignment plan, which was released after the HCS plan, Monte Sano Elementary School (MSES) students were to be rezoned for a different middle school and high school. MSES parents felt that this decision was not in the best interest of their students from both a safety (transportation route) and logical standpoint. The Monte Sano Elementary PTA board wrote a letter to the presiding judge to voice their concerns about this plan and to show its support of the HCS student assignment plan which would keep MSES in its current feeder pattern. Additionally, two MSES parents wrote letters in support of the HCS plan. All three of these letters were entered into the court record.

The two-day federal hearing at the end of May gave both the DOJ and HCS an opportunity to share their student assignment plans and make arguments in favor of them. The

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Monte Sano Elementary PTA had a board member in attendance for both days of the hearing so that she could share first hand with Monte Sano parents the information being revealed.

Additionally, when the judge allowed for public comments at the end of the hearing, our PTA board member spoke in support of the interests of the Monte Sano community.

Back to School Night, which is typically attended by over 75% of the parents, provided the next opportunity for an update on the school assignment plan. Even though the two parties had entered into closed-door arbitration and no new information was available, one of the PTA board members provided an update for families that may be new to the community or for those who may have been uninformed.

When the joint proposed consent order between the DOJ and HCS was published last month at the end of six months of arbitration, the Monte Sano PTA board immediately sent out an email update and posted on the PTA's Facebook to inform parents about the plan and the website where they could learn more. Following the release of the proposed consent order, three public forums were held during which members of the community could ask questions, make comments, and voice their concerns. Once again Monte Sano parents were represented at these hearings to gain information for the entire school community. At one of the hearings, three Monte Sano parents asked questions or made comments.

Following the approval of the proposed consent order by the Huntsville Board of Education last week, the PTA once again shared updates with the Monte Sano families through its electronic newsletter to let them know how the order would affect their students. Throughout this process, which has been the major focus of the school district for the past year, Monte Sano's PTA leaders have advocated for their students' needs, communicated with Monte Sano parents, and worked to ensure that all families are empowered to speak up for our kids.