

## **JOHN MARTINEZ – OCPS TEACHER & PARENT 1-26-22 IMPASSE STATEMENT**

This is my 6th year teaching in this district. My two sons graduated in 2020 and 2021, and my daughter is still an OCPS high school student. I am honored and humbled to speak on behalf of OCPS teachers, as well as an OCPS parent as so many of my colleagues are.

My mother dedicated her professional life to teaching, and her last year teaching was my first. You would think that she would have been delighted to hear that I was leaving the business world to inspire students and make a difference in a Title One school. She actually begged me **not** to teach because she said that OCPS's care and treatment of teachers gets worse every year. She was right, and so I ultimately became a CTA Association Representative. I felt the need to not only advocate for the students in my classroom, and help provide them with a brighter future, but I also needed to advocate for teachers and help provide them a brighter future. OCPS teachers are disrespected, underappreciated and they have no voice in decisions that impact their careers and the teaching and learning experience.

That couldn't be clearer than with OCPS' approach to health and safety during this pandemic. Last year, before we had a health and safety MOU, I was one of the first teachers to get COVID in the classroom and was a long hauler. The District sent me a letter stating that I could not discuss reasons related to my Medical Relief of Duty status. If I were to follow this direction, I would be denying my coworkers who I was in direct contact with the right to know that they had been exposed, and were potentially exposing others. The District's original position was to not reveal any positive cases to teachers or parents; it was only after under a court order that the District finally started sharing this information that is so important for the health decisions of families. This is the same District that is now asking us to trust it to make all the decisions alone.

I was relieved last year when teachers finally got an agreement that required, instead of condemned, safety and transparency. I am shocked that over half way into this new school year the district is again denying us of the health and safety rights we unfortunately already had to fight hard to achieve.

The proposal from OCPS would allow the district to change teachers' working health and safety guidelines by changing the COVID-19 Safety Manual—the proposal should be entitled "just trust us." The teachers of OCPS do not trust you. While there are numerous reasons for this mistrust, I will limit my comments health and safety. I've heard from countless teachers, and from the AR Council meeting, that teachers cannot trust the district. They have no basic protections, dirty rooms and schools, no available PPE, no social distancing, and no considerations for limiting visitors or allowing virtual meetings. The District does not enforce the procedures and policies it claims to have in place. The District has repeatedly shown it cannot be trusted.