



Together for Montclair Schools: Empowering Community, Advocating for Equity

- **Who we are:** MFE, NAACP, PTAC, and SEPAC, long-time champions of public education and educational equity in Montclair.
- **Why now:** Our district faces a financial and trust crisis years in the making that will have a long-term impact on our schools and community. Any financial decisions will impact students and families directly, but not all students in the same way.
- **Our shared goal:** Rebuild community trust and district accountability with a clear focus on equitable educational opportunities for every student.
- **Our approach:**
 - *Listen & Inform:* Gather community concerns and share credible, unbiased information through face-to-face activities to address concerns, support informed engagement, and voter participation.
 - *Advocate for Accountability:* Push for specific systems and practices from the Board of Education that result in greater transparency, fiscal responsibility, and oversight.
 - *Empower the Community:* Design and conduct community workshops and provide resources that equip residents with the knowledge and tools to be active, informed stewards of Montclair Public Schools.
- **Our belief:** Montclair's public schools won't change on promises alone—they'll change when we demand accountability, practice transparency, and organize together for equity.

The Montclair Fund for Educational Excellence (MFE), NAACP Montclair Branch, Montclair PTA Council (PTAC), and Montclair Special Education Advisory Council (SEPAC) are long-standing community stakeholders who have long-term and deep commitments to public education and improving educational equity for all students and families. Individually and collectively we have been through decades of challenges and successes in our district. We have experience asking hard questions and working collaboratively to arrive at solutions. Now, we are coming together to meaningfully support our school community at this critical time by focusing on engagement and accountability, with a north star of equitable educational opportunities for all students. Regardless of where our organizations differ, we know we are more effective working together towards this goal.

Our school and town community is diverse, in terms of race, socioeconomics, abilities, experiences, and cultural backgrounds. Any financial decisions will impact students and families directly, but not all in the same way. How can all Montclair residents be empowered and engaged to participate in the current and future conversations and decisions about our school district? How can all Montclair residents take part in holding our leaders accountable for running an excellent, equitable, and financially stable school district?

Over the next few months, our organizations will:

Listen & Inform:

Individually and collectively, we use community-centered and face-to-face strategies to understand our

communities' questions and concerns about the current budget crisis, how we got here, and suggestions for potential solutions. Next, we will create materials that provide unbiased and credible information that addresses these concerns. We will focus on resources that support in-person conversations and engagement, and will prioritize folks who are not typically reached by schools, PTAs, or social media. We intend to bring what we learn from our communities back to each other, to school administrators, and to the Board of Education, improving communications throughout the ecosystem.

Advocate for Accountability:

We recognize that members of the Board of Education (BOE) are elected volunteers who have raised their hands in service of our schools, students, and teachers. We are grateful for that commitment. But, when the BOE fails to do its job - part of which is to ensure fiscal responsibility, transparency and accountability in decision-making - public trust is broken.

People are angry about the current financial crisis not just because of the high numbers, but because this crisis is the result of years of the BOE limiting transparency, discouraging critical questioning, and relinquishing their responsibility to actively supervise district leadership. We will push the Board to adopt realistic, transparent, and actionable plans that hold each member accountable for their duties of oversight, governance, and representing the community. There will be an emphasis on institutionalizing these plans into Board practices going forward, so that they are sustained, even as current members leave and new ones are elected into office. We may also help connect the Board of Education with professional development opportunities to strengthen their effectiveness as stewards of the district.

Empower the Community:

Cultivating a high quality, equitable public school system requires an informed, engaged, and empowered school community. Our organizations believe that all community members are entitled to have a voice in how our schools are managed and governed. To help more community members effectively engage and provide input, we aim to provide a deeper understanding of the systems, policies, and processes that impact our schools. With input from community members, our organizations will design and host meetings and / or workshops to broaden and strengthen public leadership and participation. Topics can include school budgeting, BOE structure and responsibilities, how to read the district budget, and how teacher contracts work.

We are confident that our community can emerge stronger from this crisis — but only if our leaders operate with greater transparency and all of us bring bold engagement and unwavering dedication to the schools that lie at the heart of this town.

MFEE

mfee.org

NAACP Montclair

montclairnaacp.org

PTAC

montclairpta.org

SEPAC

montclairpta.org/sepac