

Good evening,

As we close out this school year—and a full two weeks of TCAP testing—We want to begin where we should always begin: with gratitude.

To our students, families, teachers, school leaders, staff, and administration—thank you. This moment reflects your discipline, your belief, and your unwavering commitment to our children.

This year, we aligned around a clear Academic Plan grounded in the five As—academics, attendance, attitude, athletics, and the arts—and we are seeing the results.

Academic growth is accelerating.

Attendance is improving through intentional supports.

School climate is strengthening.

Our student-athletes are competing—and winning—at the highest levels.

And in the arts, our students continue to earn recognition that reflects both excellence and expression.

That is what it looks like when a district stays focused and moves with purpose.

We also took a historic step forward with a new teacher salary schedule—because we know teachers are the single most important in-school factor impacting student achievement. When we invest in educators, we invest directly in outcomes for children.

For four consecutive years, this district has earned a Level 5 designation—the highest in the state—meaning our students are demonstrating academic growth toward proficiency. And nationally, a Fordham Institute study identified MSCS as the **#1 urban school district in America for academic growth among Black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students**. That recognition matters because it was achieved while serving the largest, Blackest and Brownest public school district in Tennessee—even as Tennessee ranks 51st, dead last, in public education funding, and even as this district continues to be under-funded, over-mandated, and consistently attacked. Yet despite those conditions, our students, educators, and families continue to rise.

That matters. And it reflects the work happening every single day across this district.

And yet, we also have a responsibility to speak honestly about the conditions our children are navigating outside of school.

In Shelby County, 2 in 5 children live in poverty. In Memphis, it is 1 in 3.

And those numbers are not abstract—they reflect deep inequities, where Black and Hispanic children are three to four times more likely to experience poverty than their white peers. Our city continues to rank among the highest in the nation for child poverty among large metropolitan areas.

So let's be clear: poverty is not created in our classrooms—but it shows up in them every single day.

Our teachers see it.

Our counselors see it.

Our principals see it.

And our children live it.

Poverty is an external barrier that requires coordinated, sustained investment across housing, healthcare, transportation, and economic opportunity. Schools cannot—and should not—carry that burden alone

Which is why we believe it is important, in this moment, to acknowledge what many families in this community are feeling—not just about education policy, but about representation, voice, and local self-determination.

Last week, we witnessed Nashville redraw Congressional District 9 in ways that intentionally dilutes the political voice of this majority Black city...currently the Blackest city of our size in the United States. And now, against that backdrop, this district is simultaneously facing legislation that could allow the state to assume control of the largest, Blackest and Brown public school system in Tennessee.

So for many of us, including our families, these issues do not feel separate.

We see decisions being made about Memphis rather than with Memphis. We see governance structures changing while communities already struggling with poverty continue asking for deeper investment—not deeper control.

And whether people agree or disagree, we cannot dismiss the concern many citizens have that local voice and local governance are being steadily gutted.

That concern is real.

Which is why, when recent laws impacting this district are framed as intervention, we believe we must be honest about the full context.

You cannot refuse to fully support summer food programs for hundreds of thousands, **many who live right here**, of low-income children and then call it intervention.

You cannot phase out basic supports like diapers for families already struggling, **many who live right here**, and call it intervention.

You cannot allow hundreds of millions of dollars intended for needy families, **many who live right here**, to sit unused and call it intervention.

You cannot deny access to healthcare for the working poor, **many who live right here**, turn away public health funding, or threaten resources that directly support our most vulnerable students—and call it intervention.

You cannot divert public dollars away from public schools that serve every child—and call it intervention.

That is not intervention.

That is abandonment.

That is disinvestment— plain and simple. Gone is the hood of reform.

And our community knows the difference.

Because real intervention would look different.

It would mean feeding children.

It would mean stabilizing families.

It would mean investing in teachers and schools.

It would mean partnering with communities—not overriding them.

Instead, what we are seeing is accountability without investment—and action without partnership.

And yet—despite all of that—this district continues to rise.

We rise because of our educators.

We rise because of our families.

We rise because of our students.

We rise because this community refuses to be defined by its challenges.

As Maya Angelou, the renowned Black female Presidential Medal of Freedom awardee, reminds us in *And Still I Rise*:

“You may kill me with your hatefulness...

But still, like air, I’ll rise.”

And so will we.

