February 23, 2010

Dear Students, Staff, and Parents,

I am writing today to inform you about an incident that occurred in January that has attracted significant media attention over the last two days. In this incident a teacher required a student to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. This should not have occurred.

I want to assure you that we respect students’ rights at Roberto Clemente Middle School and are committed to rectifying the situation that occurred last month. The United States Supreme Court and the Maryland Court of Appeals have been exceedingly clear that no one can be compelled to participate in the Pledge of Allegiance as this student was asked to do. Montgomery County Public Schools is fully committed to upholding students’ individual rights as outlined in the federal and state law and in our policies and regulations which clearly state that “students cannot be required to say a pledge, sing an anthem, or take part in patriotic exercises. No one will be permitted to intentionally embarrass you if you choose not to participate.”

It is unfortunate that this incident occurred at Clemente, but we will use it as a learning experience as we move forward. We have apologized to the family involved in this incident. Our entire Roberto Clemente Middle School staff is committed to building a school where all students feel respected and valued. While we fell short this time, it does not lessen our commitment.

On the reverse side of the letter sent home with students is the section of the Student Rights and Responsibilities document that addresses this issue. I have reviewed this with students and staff during our morning announcements. I am also asking all parents to discuss this important policy with their children.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this or any other issue, please let me know. I can be reached by telephone at (301) 601-0344 or email at Khadija_F_Barkley@mcpsmd.org. I know that I can count on our entire school community to work together in support of our students.

Sincerely,

Khadija F. Barkley
Acting Principal