

Dear CCPS Parents, Students, Staff and Community Members:

Earlier this week, we learned that President Obama was preparing to deliver a nationwide live speech to school children on Tuesday, September 8, 2009, at noon. The stated purpose of the speech is to encourage students to set and achieve challenging goals as well as take responsibility for their learning. The speech is expected to last approximately 15 minutes.

We have been assured that this is not a political activity and that the speech will not have political messages; however, we have not had the opportunity to view the speech.

Once we received information about the speech on September 2, 2009, CCPS staff began to investigate the logistics of showing this speech to over 16,500 students. Simultaneously, the event became a matter of controversy both in our community and across the nation.

It is our decision to make the speech available to our high school students during their one-hour lunch program if they are interested in viewing it. Students can choose from a variety of activities, and no one will be required to participate in the event. Prior to Tuesday, high school students and parents may want to discuss not only their view of the event but also how it fits into the larger picture of public discourse in a democratic society.

Elementary and middle school students will not have the opportunity to view the speech on Tuesday at school for two reasons. First of all, logistically it is impossible for us to stage the event for all children at the elementary and middle levels because many students are at lunch or in physical education, art, or recess during that time. In order to show the speech to all children, the school day at all 19 middle and elementary schools would have to be significantly altered, including lunch service.

Secondly, because of the short notice we received about the event, we are unable to put a reasonable process in place that would allow parents to opt their children out of the event. Following the President's speech, a link to the video will be posted on the CCPS website so parents who choose to do so can view it with their children and have discussions about the message.

Furthermore, once teachers and principals have had the opportunity to view the speech, they may find that it would be an appropriate instructional resource to use in a particular lesson during the coming months. A form requesting that a child be excused from such an activity will be sent home on Tuesday with elementary and middle school students. In addition, CCPS staff will not be using the lesson plan materials provided by the United States Department of Education for any activity before, during, or after the President's address.

Sincerely,

Jack Smith, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools