

**Monifa McKnight of Ridgeview Middle School
2015 Middle School Principal of the Year**



Monifa McKnight

Dr. Monifa McKnight has served as the principal of Ridgeview Middle School in Montgomery County Public Schools since 2011. Since the beginning of her tenure, she has been determined to create the best learning experience for every child, every day who walks through the doors of RMS. Her vision of excellence has come alive at Ridgeview as she lives by the quote of Aristotle, “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” These words come alive in her work and expectations for all who touch the lives of the students at Ridgeview Middle School.

Dr. McKnight embraced the principalship at RMS with a vision of improving school climate and creating positive learning experiences for all students. During her five years as Ridgeview’s principal, she has encouraged her staff members to renew their commitment to education and challenged them to reassess their educational philosophies. Montgomery County Public Schools has since acknowledged Ridgeview as the school in MCPS that made the highest increase in staff engagement as measured through the Gallup Survey. Ridgeview had a .66 increase from the 2013 – 2014 school year to the 2014 – 2015 school year. McKnight’s goals for preparing students to be 21st century learners meant developing an instructional focus on critical thinking, communicating the importance of perseverance, and cultivating self-efficacy among staff and students. Her efforts have led to significant gains for African American and Latino students who previously had not been making the same level of progress as their white and Asian counterparts, specifically in mathematics by the end of grade eight. Additionally, after reading “The Algebra Project,” she collaborated with parents to enroll students who were on a track to on-level math in grade eight to enroll in Algebra. These students also attended a summer prep program and a support class for the course at the beginning of the 2014 school year. To date, 98% of the students have earned passing grades, half of them being African American and Latino. Her leadership reflects her commitment to providing a quality education with an emphasis on classroom instruction, providing wrap-around supports for struggling students, improved

attendance, and staff and stakeholder involvement. RMS has experienced a paradigm shift under her leadership and her efforts are recognized on both the county and state levels.

Dr. McKnight's prior experiences in education include: classroom teacher, English Resource Teacher, Staff Development Teacher, and Assistant Principal. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education from South Carolina State University in Orangeburg, South Carolina, a Master of Science in Educational Leadership from Bowie State University, Bowie Maryland, and a Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy from the University of Maryland, College Park.

Colleagues describe McKnight as an exceptional leader who values, above all, excellence. She has presented at national conferences regarding strategies to address inequities in school suspensions that negatively impact the academic success of students of color. Establishing open dialogue with parents is important to her; therefore, she consistently communicates using newsletters, social media, written notes and phone calls. Moreover, the instructional program at RMS continues to strengthen through ongoing professional development as Dr. McKnight has created a strong culture around building and sustaining professional learning communities for teachers and teacher leaders at RMS since her first year. Dr. McKnight's philosophy of personalizing the work and investing in the children comes to fruition in her daily interactions with staff and students.