



## Blair Teacher Is Montgomery County Nominee for Post Teacher of the Year Award

MCPS Bulletin

Since 2001, Kenneth Smith has taught at Montgomery Blair High School, the largest school in Maryland with more than 3,000 students and 310 staff members.

Smith stands out, instilling in students an extraordinary desire to learn and inspiring them to advocate for social justice. Colleagues call him an excellent teacher who spends a great deal of time building strong relationships with students and developing a welcoming community in the classroom. Smith believes that when students see themselves reflected in what's being taught, they are more likely to engage with the material and achieve at higher levels.

Smith is this year's MCPS nominee for The Washington Post Teacher of the Year award.

"I want my students to be more than independent learners and critical thinkers about content; I want them to be change agents that employ their newly gained knowledge to serve themselves and their communities," Smith wrote in his nomination packet.

He currently teaches U.S. Government, Media Literacy, African American Studies and Sociology.

As part of an effort to get to know his students as individuals, Smith believes it is essential to be involved in their lives outside of class. He attends sporting events, musical recitals, theatrical performances and even political rallies in which students speak on issues important to their social justice beliefs.

A National Certified Board teacher and a Lattice Lead teacher for MCPS, Smith recognizes the achievement gap as an opportunity gap. He advocates for underrepresented students to have the opportunity to access rigorous courses to improve their achievement. As the sponsor of the school's Minority Scholars Program (MSP), he often shares school data with students and actively seeks their perspective and ideas for improvement. He regularly recruits minority students to take honors and Advanced Placement classes.

At Blair, he is also the sponsor of Black CAP, a group of student leaders of color in the school's Communication Arts Program. He is working with colleagues at area middle schools to establish mentoring and tutoring programs for middle school students. With MSP, Smith is working with students to develop a model to integrate parents of MSP members into the school community to help them navigate the school system and become more effective advocates for their children's success. He also participated in a Study Circles training for the school's Instructional Leadership Team to help staff engage in challenging conversations about race and ethnicity. He was the only fulltime teacher on the team. He directed an outgrowth of the program at Blair, training 15 teachers and 40 students to become facilitators.

Smith has shown outstanding leadership in other ways, as well. With more than 12,000 teachers in MCPS, fewer than 350 are African American males and even fewer are Latino. Smith is a leadership team member for the BOND (Building our Network of Diversity) Project, an initiative focused the increased hiring of male educators of color, increasing professional development and serving as a mentoring network for male educators of color.

During the summer, he consults with the Thurgood Marshall College Fund via the Teacher Quality Retention Program, which provides training and mentoring to aspiring, pre-service and new teachers from Historically Black Colleges and Universities across the country.

Smith is known as a patient, collaborative and reflective teacher who effectively offers suggestions and strategies to colleagues to improve student achievement. He models an active interest in social issues and the global society. Students often comment that Smith "gets it, he really listens and he really cares."