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Tonya McBride, 2013

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Tonya McBride: They're identical, the twins?

Hibbert: On behalf of Crossroads to Freedom and the Center for Transforming Communities, we'd like to thank you for sharing your inspiring story with us today. I'm Caroline Hibbert –

Doss: And I'm Dashauna Doss.

Tonya McBride: Okay, well nice to meet you and I'm more than happy to do it.

Hibbert: Could you state your name?

Tonya McBride: Tonya McBride.

Hibbert: And where were you born?

Tonya McBride: I was born here in Memphis, Tennessee.

Hibbert: And were you raised here as well?

Tonya McBride: Yes.

Hibbert: What community did you grow up in?

Tonya McBride: I grew up in South Memphis, but more so the end closer to Whitehaven, near Hamilton High School. So not the traditional when people think of South Memphis they think of Walker and Macklamore. Not that far south.

Hibbert: Okay, and what did your parents do?

Tonya McBride: My mother worked for the Marriot most of my teenage years and even until the _____, and my father worked for Kroger Bakery until he retired.

[00:01:00]

Hibbert: And did you have any brothers or sisters?

Tonya McBride: Yes. I have six brothers and sisters. There's seven of us total, five girls and two boys.

Hibbert: Wow.

Hibbert: And could you just state for the record what your occupation is now, what you're doing?

Tonya McBride: Okay. I'm currently the Principal of Treadwell Middle School. I've been officially the Principal at Treadwell for two days. This is my second day. I previously was the Principal at A. Maceo Walker Middle School for the last eight years.

Hibbert: So what made you want to pursue a career in education?

Tonya McBride: My mother and father always taught about the power of education and how important it was to get an education and to better your circumstances. So although I grew up in a home with two parents and everything, we still was a general working class or poor

[00:02:00]

working class family, so it was instilled in us the importance of really taking your studies seriously, going to school, doing well in school so hopefully you can get a college scholarship because I know, or I knew my parents couldn't afford to send us to school. And with that opportunity you can do whatever you want to do.

And so as I got older and as I went off to school I thought about being a doctor, but I knew I didn't want to do the people end of doctoring, so I did some research at UT a couple summers in a lab and I hated that. It was just so boring because you never had a lot interaction with people. And so I transitioned to education and I've been in it for the last 20 years.

Hibbert: And what high school did you go to?

Tonya McBride: I graduated from Overton High School in 1988.

Hibbert: And can you describe some of your past jobs that you've had, either as a teacher or a principal at other schools?

[00:03:00]

Tonya McBride: Okay, well I was a teacher at Trezevant High School for five years in the mid 90's to early 2000, then I transitioned into an assistant principalship at Trezevant High School which is in the Fraser Community in Memphis for four years, and then after my time at Trezevant I transitioned to A. Maceo Walker as Principal.

Hibbert: Could you describe some of the goals you have coming to Treadwell as the new Principal?

Tonya McBride: Okay, well one of the huge goals that I have, well first of all, Treadwell is becoming an I Zone school, so that's an innovation zone school. And basically what that means is that's one step away from State takeover. And so the State allows the district to come in, revamp the school. They recruit a new principal, new staff members, and let us try to transform the school so we can make the appropriate State mandated gains.

[00:04:00] So one of my biggest goals for Treadwell is to ensure that we meet those state benchmarks and ensure that learning occurs. My second goal is I really want to make Treadwell a conducive place for learning for our students. I firmly believe that my babies - and that's what I call them, my babies, my sweeties - they deserve the best. And so what I do in my job is to ensure that they have the best resources, the best environment, the best teachers so they can get the best education possible.

And my other huge goal for Treadwell is to instill in my students that same love for education that my parents instilled in me and let them know that despite whatever circumstances you're in, whatever environment that you came from, you can achieve whatever dream you choose to achieve, and especially these days because the world is just wide open for young people and you can

[00:05:00]

do anything and travel the world and go a bunch of places that I never even thought of going when I was 11 or 12.

And so we need to let our babies know that those dreams are possible, and we need to instill that in them. And so that's my three major goals.

Doss: Why did you want to come to Treadwell?

Tonya McBride: Well, you're young Ms. Cab, is it?

Doss: Doss.

Tonya McBride: Doss, Ms. Doss. You're young Ms. Doss so sometimes you probably haven't realized this yet, but sometimes in life as you get older you just realize that it's time to make a change. Everything was going really well at my previous school, at A. Maceo Walker. We were actually a reward school from the State, so it was a no

force move. It was just simply time for me to make a transition and help other students and help another community.

[00:06:00]

When I got to A. Maceo Walker we were basically in this same state. We were a striving school. That's what they were called back then. And we transitioned and we became a reward school. We made our benchmarks within two years and continued to grow. And so I felt like my work was done at A. Maceo Walker, so it was time to just move on and do something different.

And I'm always, I'm a big competitor and I like a challenge. And so I like to go in and change things because I know people can make anything happen that they choose to make happen. And so I don't like people saying well who is this, is this, is this. All of that is neither here nor there. We can change and we can make Treadwell the best school in Memphis, which it will be in two years when I finish with it and my staff members finish with it if we all work together to do that.

Hibbert:

So you're just going to be there for two years?

Tonya McBride:

No. I'm just saying that's, no. My goal is we're going to make our benchmarks in the first year and then the second year we're

[00:07:00]

going to be a reward school. That's my goal, so I'm just saying one of the best schools as recognized by the State. So no, I don't have, I don't have a timeline, but that's my goal for myself.

Hibbert:

Oh okay.

Tonya McBride:

And that's what one of my teachers she told me, "Oh I know you all will have it fixed next year," 'cause that's just, that's how we work. We come in and we work hard, and we address challenges immediately, and we fix it. We're not going to take ten years to address the issues. They're going to be addressed when the kids walk through the door.

Doss:

Okay. What's challenging about Treadwell?

Tonya McBride:

Well, the big thing that's challenging about Treadwell is, well the first challenge – I haven't really met the kids or a lot of the parents. I went to a couple of the community meetings. But the biggest challenge that I face right now is just the condition of the building. It was really disheartening to me that the building was allowed to look as it looked.

[00:08:00] So I have been working with the district staff members for the last, since the beginning of May, even before school got out you all probably saw the people coming in doing some work, young people before you all left, to just address some of the major physical needs of the plant.

So we have done some thorough cleaning. The bathrooms have been painted. All those ceiling tiles fixed, stall doors on every door. Every restroom has new tissue holders, and paper towel holders, and soap holders. All that excess junk has been thrown away. We've thrown away ten dumpsters of just papers from the 70's and 80's, and books from the 60's. It was just, it was just full of hoard.

So that was, that's the biggest challenge I've faced thus far. We're continuing to work on that. I think the electrician has replaced 100 plus light bulbs that simply were out that had not been addressed. The stairwells have been painted to kind of make them look a little better.

[00:09:00] I've had the contract for the painting of the whole building is in the process. That's going to take a little bit longer, but it's going to be done before the year is out, but it has to go through a bid process young people, so they already wrote that for me and they just need to, you have to bid it out and put it in the paper so contractors can bid on the project. So that's in the process.

They're working on, all those auditorium seats that's broken. They're taking them all out, fixing all of those for me. All that junk that was on the stage, we've discarded all of that. That's why my shoes are dirty, because at my school we don't have trash around the building. We keep the building clean.

[00:10:00] So that's the biggest challenge I face right now, and it's been very difficult because I don't know if you all can see my dirty hands. A lot of it I'm partaking in the clean up because it needs to be done. So my AP, my secretary, I have a couple volunteers, we're coming in and we're addressing these issues. Fixing computers, just trying to get the building ready for you all, that's been the biggest challenge.

Hibbert: So what are some of the new rules that you're going to be putting in at Treadwell in terms of discipline for the students?

Tonya McBride: Well it's probably not any new rules. It's probably just enforcement of current district policy concerning student behavior

in the Code of Conduct. Our motto is we soar, you know eagles soar. So we show respect. We operate responsibly. We act right and then we reach for our highest academic goals. That's what we do every day.

So in everything you do you show respect. Everything you do you operate responsibly. That's why at my previous school like I was really disappointed in those bathrooms when I saw them. We all, even if you didn't put the trash on the floor you pick it up and put it in the garbage can because we operate responsibly and that's how we take care of the building together.

[00:11:00] Act right there simply no matter what the situation is you do the right thing. And then our **R** you just reach for your academic goals. Everything you do you do it so it's going to benefit you academically and help you be successful in life.

So that's our theme. And then we do have our, well those are our behavior expectations. Our themes is we're making Treadwell a mean school. We make excellence a necessity, so I need mean students, I need mean teachers, I need mean parents where excellence is a necessity. So everything we do we do it to excellent standard. And that's why one of the things I'm really addressing in the building because I want my young people and my parents to walk in and know that we have a standard of high expectations in excellence when you hit these doors at Treadwell..

Doss: What's your favorite thing about Treadwell?

Tonya McBride: Well my favorite thing about Treadwell, well I haven't met my students but I'm sure it's going to be, you all are going to be my favorite thing about it, but I am, I love to decorate and I love buildings with character, and I think Treadwell is such a pretty building. All that wood trimming and all those windows, it would cost thousands of dollars to have those windows made nowadays.

[00:12:00]

I'm in a new building at A. Maceo, so it's just thrown together. So that's what I love about the building. The building has character and it has a history, and it was at its height a long time ago and we can bring it back to that so we have something to draw on.

Doss: Why is discipline so important to you?

Tonya McBride: Well because without discipline and structure no learning can take place. It's just that plain and simple.

Hibbert: Could you tell us, our kids are going into the seventh grade, could you tell us a little bit what you know about the seventh grade teachers coming in?

Tonya McBride: I'm trying to think.

Hibbert: Or about the new staff in general.

[00:13:00]

Tonya McBride: Okay. Well I have about 13 teachers I'm bringing with me from A. Maceo Walker. They're all Level 5 teachers, Level 4, a couple of them Level 4, but most of them Level 5. Really strong teachers who teach every day. One thing that we don't do is we don't do busy work here. We have order and structure.

So they're going to be, they're going to provide the kids with high quality instruction. I'm a technology geek, so my teachers are expected to incorporate technology into every lesson. So all those Smart Boards and with all those pens missing and cords missing, we're addressing that because you cannot provide students with the type of instruction you need because that's the world you all live in.

[00:14:00] You all live in a high tech world, you need to see it in the classroom. And so I'm fixing that. The teachers are, those seventh grade teachers, I have Ms. Williams and Ms. Stewart, they're coming with me from A. Maceo Walker. Mr. Taylor is an Instructional Resource teacher. Ms. Hicks, and I'm trying to think, I'm trying to remember. I'm trying to remember, I'm losing my mind. But you have some really strong teachers, some good teachers.

And what we have done with the building, and this is you all made light, we actually have a sixth grade on the bottom floor, they're front end. The seventh grade on the second floor, the eighth grade on the third. So all of you all will have your little own little city. So you all take care of your own little city.

So the seventh grade restrooms are all painted and clean, so it's you all responsibility to make sure it stays that way and you hold your classmates accountable for that. So that's the type of atmosphere that we try to create. I really believe in empowering my teams of teachers and the teams will run the show.

And so when Ms. Williams says that Mr. Princeton do something, well Mr. Prince you know you may be, not be able to go to our

[00:15:00] talent show that we're going to do. I let them have autonomy to say which students participate in activities, which students participate in sports, which students participate in whatever we choose to do. But you all have some really teachers who are coming. I assure you of that.

Hibbert: So this is along the lines of kids' I guess incentives performing well and having good behavior. They were kind of wondering if there will be rewards for that. Like they were specifically wondering about like dances, things like that.

Tonya McBride: Right. We do that now. We do that all the time at A. Maceo Walker, and it was funny, I was talking to some of you all in Ms. Davis's class one day when I stopped by and we had just actually had our spring talent show. So we do a lot of those things. We try, we always do a back to school dance. I do a winter ball. I do a Valentine's Day dance. I do a spring formal. I do a fall talent show right before Thanksgiving. We do a spring one right before spring break. We do a **tea cap** spirit week. We do our tea cap intramural games.

[00:16:00] But all of this is determined by if students can behave, because you all don't know me yet, but my babies at A. Maceo Walker already knew I would cancel something in a heartbeat because when I say stop I need you to stop. I can't have kids doing, having to say something three and four times to young people.

So that's in our plans. So if you all want to do all those things you get your peers to behave. And one of the things even with the teams, you asked about the seventh grade teachers, I ask that my teams to an incentive every month. So like I had one team in sixth grade last year who really they'll do an ice cream social, they'll do, every month they had something - a movie day - something for their kids. So we really try to encourage good behavior and good academics with those little small things.

Hibbert: And you were talking about incorporating technology into the classroom earlier. How much access I guess will the kids themselves have to technology as in computers, stuff that they can use at school?

[00:17:00]
Tonya McBride: Okay, well they have access in every classroom. We've, actually this is why my hands are dirty, I've been moving computers this morning and cleaning up those tables so they're not covered in dust and everything. There's student computers in every classroom, creating three student labs. I have a sixth grade lab, a

seventh grade lab, and an eighth grade lab. So they're delivering those computers next week.

So the students have wide open access to the computers. And one of the things that I expect to see when I enter classrooms, even from my teachers' standpoint, that the kids have to use the technology. And even with the Smart Boards and all of the interactive things, I really like to see interactive things in the classrooms.

So as the teachers instruct, the kids should be a part of that instruction where they're actively participating with those technology resources and not them sitting to the side gathering dust.

Hibbert:
[00:18:00] We might have already kind of touched on this, but what do you think is unique about coming into this job at Treadwell versus you said that you went to a state zone school before -

Tonya McBride: I Zone school, well a striving school.

Hibbert: - and made those improvements. So what do you think is unique about your experience coming into Treadwell?

Tonya McBride: Well what is unique about Treadwell is I have the opportunity to hire the entire staff. Unfortunately at A. Maceo Walker when I came I just inherited the school, so I was the only new person. So it took me a couple years to build my staff.

But in this situation since I was able to hire the entire staff and I know my 13 is coming with me, I know their work ethic. I know what they do. And then the other ones who are recently hired who most of them are either first year teachers or second year teachers, I can mold them into those excellent teachers that I need them to be.

So that's the most unique thing about the situation because I've never had that opportunity to do that before.

Hibbert:
[00:19:00] And what's your I guess criteria for hiring staff? What do you look for in teachers?

Tonya McBride: I look for people who are deeply committed to doing whatever it takes, and people who have a positive attitude about kids and not blaming kids and situations. I had one teacher a few years ago when everything was always the kid's fault and she always made

the statement, "Well they ought to know." And my response was, "Well it's obvious they don't know, so you teach them." And so we can't sit here and blame kids for circumstances they had no control over.

So I look for people who are pleasant, who generally want to do well, because it's hard to motivate people to live up to an excellent standard. I tell my staff all the time, I tell my babies all the time that your standard for yourself should be higher than any standard that anyone else has for you.

[00:20:00]

So I went over some of the data with some of my teachers, it's already come back from the last TCAP, and it's so funny because I already know when they sent the email who had already looked at their data. So when they're calling me, and they already knew, one called me last night. She said, "I knew you already looked at it," because that's what we do. We don't wait even though it's the middle of the summer. As soon as we get the email from the State they already know I pulled it out, I already wrote it, broke it down, and I have staff members who is going to do that in the middle of the summer on vacation.

Over Christmas break when data comes from tests, we take one test right before Christmas and the reports always come back over Christmas. So I already know my ten people who are going to look over and have it already dissected when we hit the school door in January. I'm looking for those type of people who are willing to do that and give up themselves and of their time to make lives better for our babies here.

Hibbert:

Now what is the difference, I, they mentioned that Treadwell isn't a Memphis City school anymore, it's a Shelby County school.

Tonya McBride:

All schools are Shelby County schools.

Hibbert:

Okay.

Tonya McBride:

No, I said Treadwell was an I Zone school.

Hibbert:

[00:21:00]

Oh okay. So I must have gotten confused that it wasn't considered a –

Tonya McBride:

No, it's still Shelby County. No, it's still Shelby County. It's just, it's basically you just get a big grant from the State and you get extra money to help it reach those benchmarks, but it's still a Shelby County school. It's one step away from State takeover. If

we don't make our gains within the timeframe the State has set, then the State possibly can take over the school. So.

Looney: What does State takeover mean?

Tonya McBride: The State actually comes in and takes over the school. Those ASD achievement school district schools, I'm not sure if you all have seen them on the news. Hamilton is one, North Side, it was five original ones two years ago – Hamilton, North Side, Fraser, there was a couple other one in Chattanooga, but those are schools where the State comes in and takes over the school.

[00:22:00] They either charter them out like Cypress, and I don't know if you all know where Cypress, where Cypress they let **KIP** come in and run the school. So KIP took over a grade level each year. They're doing the same thing with **Corey** Middle School. KIP is coming in next year and KIP will run the sixth grade, and then the next year they'll take the seventh grade, the next year the eighth grade until they have full control over the entire school. Those are State takeover schools.

Looney: How long do you think, how long do you think it will take for Treadwell to turn over a new leaf as far as the academic standard of the students?

Tonya McBride: Well the academic standard will be set immediately when they hit the front door. So babies bring your backpacks because we give out books the first day; they're already in the classrooms. That's just, I've been doing that for years. We give out books, my teachers are directed to give homework because we understand that school starts from the day you hit the door.

So it won't take long for the standard to be set, but it's going to

[00:23:00] have to be, the young people are going to have to get the mentality that it's not longer these games that they apparently have played over these last couple years, and the parents are going to have to get accustomed to that, that we are dead serious about education.

So when you hit the door, we start the first day. And then I think, you know over, it won't take long. The first nine weeks. It always takes the first nine weeks.

Looney: Okay, and the experience that we had with other people who have gone to Treadwell when it was a high school, they mentioned how

the parents were involved with the school and with the students and with the activities. How do you plan to involve the students with their children in Treadwell?

Tonya McBride:
[00:24:00]

Well what you do to get parents involved, you make it an open door policy. When parents feel welcome they will get involved. And so that's what we try to do in, I think if you even hit the front door today we have all our flowers and our Welcome to Treadwell sign, and just make it a welcoming place.

One of the things that I ask my teachers to do, like we, they contact parents all the time and we do a lot of parent conferences and parent meetings. We do monthly PTO meeting where we try to get the parents to come in. Different family math and science night, family literacy night, and just different things to get the parents involved.

But I think once parents know that you are genuinely concerned about their students then they will get involved. And once you make them feel welcome and help them understand, or prove to them that you're in this for the well being of their young people.

[00:25:00]

And that's one of the things that we really pride ourselves on, really working with parents. When I announced that I was leaving A. Maceo Walker, had many parents like Ms. McBride what are we going to do, because one of the things that we try to do and my parents already know that I'm really, really serious about this one. When I first got there I had to fight that battle the first year until they understood that it's going to be, it's this way simply for safety sake and so we can have good instruction taking place.

So once we broke down that wall they understood that we're doing everything we can to make sure these students are safe and they get the best education possible. So I rarely had confrontations with parents because they already knew we will walk the length – I'm not sure if any of you all know where A. Maceo Walker is, but we would actually walk the length from the school to _____. So we were walking, we would walk the kids almost halfway home every day, me and my 60 _____, every single day so we can let the parents know that we are generally concerned.

[00:26:00]

Because those are things that we don't have to do. But I do them because I love my babies and I want them to be safe. And see once you do things like that then parents start to trust you. So they start to tell you boy you going to do whatever Ms. McBride tells you to

do because we see her, she walk all the way down there and she don't have to do that. Then parents will start believing in you.

And so that's what we try to do. I have a real, a real open door policy. I give most of the parents my cell phones. I work all night most days, so if Prince's mom doesn't get off 'til 7:00 and you need to see me, come when you get off work. That's how we, that's how we do school.

Hibbert: Is there anything else you'd like to add or a message for the kids or something before we wrap up or?

Tonya McBride: Well I'm just looking forward to an exciting year at Treadwell. I'm looking forward to letting my babies and my parents walk in to a brand new place. I'm looking forward to us having a fun year. I'm looking to make the school a better place for the young people. So I want you all to really understand and spread the word to your friends that we are going to enjoy school.

[00:27:00]

'Cause I love, I love throwing parties. Like I decorated, I always decorate for prom. I get up and they come in, "Who hung up all the things on the ceiling?" "Ms. McBride. She climbed on a ladder," 'cause I climb on a ladder in a minute and hang all the balloons and different things from the ceiling. I'm looking forward to doing that for you. I'm looking forward to doing that for you all.

But I want you all to know that you have to hold up your end of the bargain. 'Cause all I ask that you do, come in and do your work. Respect the teachers. Give your best effort. And if you do that we're going to have a remarkable year. You all are going to be so surprised when you all walk in and just see all the changes we've made to the building.

And so and I really, I appreciate you all doing this.

Hibbert: Well thank you so much. We really appreciated having you in and sharing your goal for Treadwell with us.

Tonya McBride: Okay. Well thank you.

[End of Audio]