

**Superintendent's Report
Board of Education Meeting
August 13, 2019**

Welcome to the 2019-2020 school year!

Last year, student behavior, discipline and school safety were significant issues, and I want to update you on what we are doing to address these issues. I firmly believe that most student behavior concerns can be resolved through a positive school climate, a trusting relationship between students and staff, and instruction that is engaging and student centered. We have focused on student engagement and relationships for the past several years, and this work is paying off. In classrooms and schools where student engagement activities are being utilized student behavior issues happen less often and are less severe. But, as you know, we still have work to do.

Part of this work begins tomorrow with the kick off our leadership institute. This year's institute includes three powerful speakers, Manny Scott, the author of "Even on Your Worst Day, You Can Be a Student's Best Hope" will be our first speaker. Our principals took part in a yearlong book study of his book last school year, and we know that Mr. Scott's message will resonate with our school leaders.

Our second speaker is Russell McClain, the associate dean for diversity and inclusion at the University of Maryland. Mr. McClain's remarks will focus on implicit bias and stereotype threats and show how they can interfere with relationship building and teaching and learning in our classrooms.

Our final guest speaker is Michele Gay, a Sandy Hook Elementary School parent who lost her daughter Josephine during the horrific tragedy in 2012. Mrs. Gay is the co-founder and executive director of Safe and Sound Schools, a nonprofit school safety group and speaks across the nation to school leaders, law enforcement and parents.

To help teachers and administrators manage in appropriate student behavior, we have trained more than 800 of our staff members in a strategy called Restorative Practices. Restorative practices enable those who have been harmed to convey the impact of the harm to those responsible, and for those responsible to acknowledge this impact and take steps to make it right. Restorative practices also strengthens relationships between people. The training gives administrators and teachers practical skills they can use every day to set high expectations while being supportive. It provides a guide for staff to give direct feedback, ask questions that foster accountability, and prevent conflict by helping students build and repair relationships. Additional training took place this summer and will continue throughout the school year.

Another step we have taken to address student behavior is by creating a classroom management course for instructional assistants. At the support staff Town Hall, we heard from IAs that they wanted more training. We have partnered with the College of Southern Maryland to teach staff how to use behavioral interventions to reduce students'

problematic behavior in the classroom. The class is free to support staff members who work in a classroom, and our first cohort began the class last week.

As you know, we convened a discipline committee composed of teachers, administrators, community members, parents, support staff and bus contractor representatives last school year. We plan to continue this work this year. The committee provided feedback on the *Code of Student Conduct*, specifically in the areas of dress code, transportation and cell phones. Our experiences with the discipline committee taught us that opinions on discipline and the actions we should take can be emotional and vastly different. There are no easy answers here, but we will continue to include the community in this meaningful discussion.

We will continue to look for ways to address nonviolent and noncriminal behavior within the school community. Part of this effort includes implementing positive behavior programs and mental health interventions so children receive the support they need to succeed. We are developing alternatives to suspensions and expulsion to manage student behavior with high quality alternatives and settings. Along with that, we need increased parent involvement in our schools to reinforce the messages we are sending to students during the school day.

The Fresh Start Academy, a Charles County Public Schools program that will provide supports for children in kindergarten to second grade, will open this fall. I am pleased to announce that Dr. Dianna Abney, a local pediatrician and former health officer, has agreed to chair our citizens' advisory board that will provide community input on the Fresh Start Academy.

Teachers and school leaders will do everything they can to help students manage their behavior. Having said this, I want to make something perfectly clear to the Board and our public. The foremost responsibility of school leaders is to ensure a safe and orderly school environment so that teaching and learning can occur. Students who present a danger to our school environments will be suspended. I have never, and will never tell our principals to reduce suspensions so that our numbers will "look good". While I believe that suspensions are not effective ways to change behavior, there are times when suspensions are the only appropriate response to a student's dangerous behavior. I trust our principals to make decisions that keep our schools safe, and support them when they make a decision to suspend.

All newly hired employees undergo a comprehensive background check when hired. This summer, the Office of Safety and Security began random background checks on current employees. The new random checks will recheck a portion of our employees on a rolling basis.

Three weeks from today we will open our 22nd elementary school, Billingsley, and reopen Dr. Mudd Elementary School, which has been renovated and expanded. We have a grand re-opening planned for Dr. Mudd on Friday, October 11 and a dedication for Billingsley on April 17. With the opening of Billingsley, a new elementary school

redistricting approved nearly two years ago takes effect. Later today, Mr. Heim and his team will highlight the many other major construction projects that were accomplished in the past few months.

The 2019-20 school year officially kicks off on September 3 when our students return. Prior to that we welcome new teachers to a comprehensive orientation next Monday, and returning teachers on August 26.

Welcome to the new school year. As always, thank you for your support of teaching and learning.