

BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Darryl L. Williams, Ed.D. ♦ Superintendent ♦ 6901 North Charles Street ♦ Towson, MD ♦ 21204

June 11, 2022

The Honorable Members of County Council
Historic Courthouse
400 Washington Avenue
Towson, Maryland 21204

Dear County Council Members:

I am writing in response to the June 7, 2022, letter from five members of the Baltimore County Council to Board of Education Chair Julie Henn. In the letter, council members allege "infrequent" communication and a struggling response to persistent, long-standing issues. As superintendent of Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS), I am committed to ensuring the well-being and success of students and staff. This letter addresses the June 7, 2022, claims with concrete evidence of the work that has taken place in the three years that I have proudly served as superintendent.

It is important to note that while pandemic-related "direct health consequences" and "vast interruptions to everyday life" are referenced in the Council letter, notably absent from the letter is the recognition of the tangible, long-lasting impact on our society and public school systems. Our schoolhouse doors are open, however, as public health and educational experts have noted, expectations for a rapid return to normal are unrealistic and belie the lived experiences of families. This is not an excuse, but critical context for the current state of affairs.

BCPS has proactively provided the Council with information about system operations, student and staff achievements, and strategic planning. The Council's claims of "inconsistent and infrequent" communication paint an incomplete picture of our partnership. During my tenure, I have conducted 15 meetings with the entire County Council or individual members. Just this year, our office has shared 18 informational items with elected officials including Superintendent's Reports, "Things to Know" from Board of Education meetings, Efficiency Report updates, community updates, serious incident reports, Transitions to Virtual Learning during the Omicron surge, and COVID-19 mitigation strategies. Additionally, we have written nine letters to the County Council to address questions and provide updates on system progress. To my knowledge, no question has gone unanswered, no meeting has been declined. My staff and I took swift action and immediately scheduled meetings with Council members when we learned on May 31, 2022, during the County Council work session, that additional concerns needed to be addressed. The invitation was declined. Instead, we met with the Council Chair and shared detailed information regarding our efforts to mitigate transportation challenges. On June 3, 2022, we sent a [detailed letter](#) to all members of the County Council and I requested individual meetings with all County Council members. To date, only three council members have accepted my invitation. My team has also invited the full Council to a meeting on June 16,

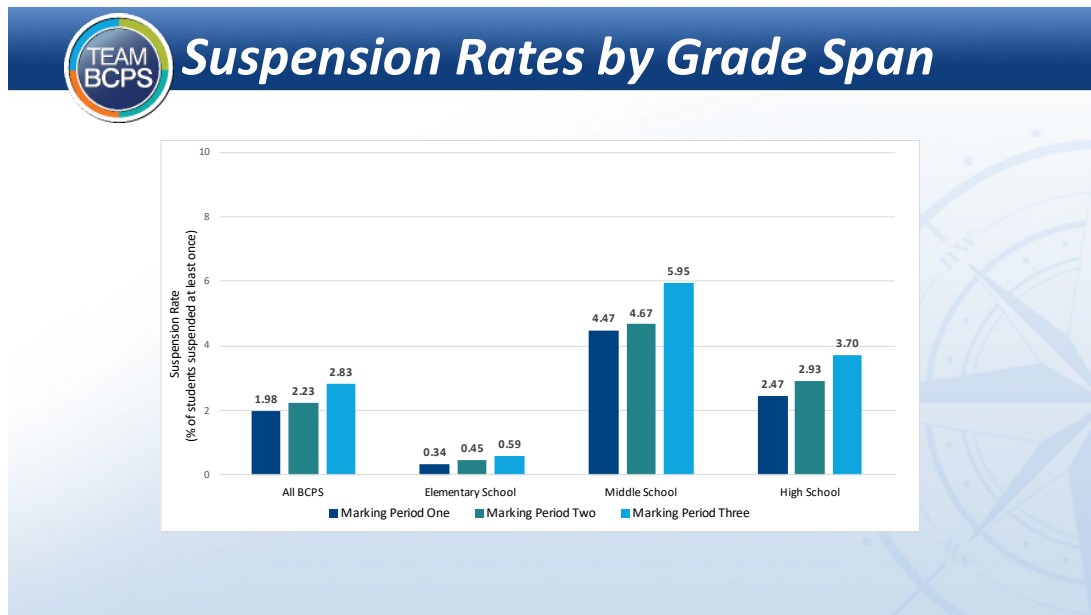
2022, to provide a detailed update and answer questions related to transportation. I hope that we are joined by our County Council partners.

In its letter, members of the Council quote from the Efficiency Review, acknowledging long-standing BCPS concerns, the majority of which predate my tenure, and assert that BCPS leadership has “struggled” to meet the challenge. During this ongoing global pandemic, following a cyberattack, BCPS received and responded to the 759-page report identifying recommendations to increase efficiency and effectiveness. On September 14, 2021, I committed to the following outcomes related to the Efficiency Review Report:

- Significant cost-savings focused on operational efficiency.
- A reorganization of central office staff to ensure the effective and efficient provision of services to schools.
- A comprehensive, collaborative plan to improve staff morale, communication, and stakeholder satisfaction.

To date, these commitments have been achieved. BCPS accepted 89% of the recommendations, far exceeding the national response average of 80%. Responsible cost reductions in the amount of \$7.7 million dollars have been completed. These savings include a reduction of 9.0 FTEs totaling \$1.7 million through the reorganization of Cabinet and \$6.0 million through device cost reductions. The final report, representing 9 months of work and the collaboration of numerous stakeholders is posted on [the BCPS website](#).

The letter indicates “no real solutions” for providing a safe learning environment for students. Fostering safe and supportive environments has been a top priority for BCPS. Despite a strong emphasis on implementation of social-emotional learning signature practices in all schools in response to pandemic related trauma, suspension rates increased for all levels during each marking period. Additionally, we have piloted a new [safety assistant position](#) in 20 secondary schools this spring to provide direct support and utilize de-escalation strategies in partnership with school resource officers and administrative teams. We are expanding the rollout of these positions to all secondary schools by the fall.



A detailed plan of action has been collaboratively developed for implementation in schools. Leadership training will begin on July 20, 2022. Key features of the plan include:

- Grant-funded student safety assistants in all secondary schools focused on relationship building, proactive adult presence, and de-escalation strategies.
- Increased understanding of the Code of Conduct and greater consistency in the application of guidelines across schools to include bus infractions; ensure all school disciplinary plans are shared with the community.
- Enhanced community partnership opportunities to provide positive in-school experiences at arrival, lunch, and dismissal.
- Revamped procedures to effectively communicate outcomes related to bullying and harassment investigations.
- Increased alternative educational options for students in need of wrap-around supports.
- Staff refresher training in de-escalation strategies and expanded self-regulation support and strategies for students.

The letter claims BCPS has not provided “real solutions” for “getting students to school on time and having enough teachers to provide instruction.” Nationwide shortages in all facets of the workforce have been widely documented. The Public Works efficiency report states “school systems and contractors across America have been struggling with recruiting and retaining bus drivers for years (page 322).” BCPS has acknowledged the nationwide shortage and worked in partnership with Baltimore County Government and local districts to find solutions including increased compensation, bonuses, and removal of pre-employment barriers.

A review of local driver shortages in Maryland indicates that many large school districts continue to have difficulty with recruitment of additional drivers. Specifically, Prince Georges County, Howard County, and Baltimore County continue to have more than 75 vacancies.

Primary areas of focus include: recruiting and retaining staff, improving service efficiency, consistent responses to bus infractions, and enhanced communication technologies. A detailed update on transportation can be found [here](#). Our current pilot programs for the mobile and web-based communications application for stakeholders, Multifunction School Activity Buses in 4 high schools, and 2-way radio implementation plan aim to meet the needs of Baltimore County Public Schools' stakeholders. Proposed service adjustments for the fall, coupled with a comprehensive communications plan are expected to result in significant improvements in service to families.

While the letter acknowledges a nationwide shortage of teachers, it also contends that "BCPS had over a year before the start of the 2021-22 school year to address issues such as vacancies." The current staffing crisis in public schools is taking place throughout the nation. The Maryland State Department of Education 2021-2022 Teacher Vacancy Report revealed 1,906.4 teacher vacancies in the state of Maryland. Specifically, Prince Georges County reported 462.4 vacancies, Montgomery County – 291, Anne Arundel County – 128, and Baltimore County – 298.1, including the virtual learning program. Throughout the course of the school year, the Division of Human Resources has conducted 155 recruiting events to hire teachers, increased partnerships with colleges and universities, and expanded its digital presence on a variety of communication platforms to recruit more teachers.

BCPS is diligently working to address long-standing issues with staff climate and morale. We have engaged in the following efforts with all unions throughout the year to build a culture of collaboration and problem-solving.

- Solicited feedback of all unions and staff through frequent leadership meetings.
- Identified organization climate goals for the upcoming year (customer service and team building).
- Developed a comprehensive plan that addresses organizational climate, worksite engagement, recognition, and wellness for all members of Team BCPS.
- Identified ongoing opportunities for staff retention and wellness, including bonuses, wellness breaks, and support to schools.

BCPS is grateful for the support of the Council and its investment in our children and staff. In the spirit of continuous improvement, I remain open to opportunities to share and collaborate with the County Council on how we can work together to improve efficiencies and effectiveness in support of students, staff, and families in Baltimore County Public Schools.

The Honorable Members of the County Council

June 11, 2022

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Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Darryl L. Williams", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Darryl L. Williams, Ed.D.

Superintendent

Copies to:

Members of the Board of Education

The Honorable John Olszewski, Jr., County Executive

Dr. Myriam Yarbrough, Deputy Superintendent

Ms. Mildred Charley-Greene, Chief of Staff

Mr. Dwayne "Tony" Baysmore, Director of Government Relations