

BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Community Update: Safe and Supportive Schools

Dear Team BCPS:

As superintendent of Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS), I am committed to ensuring that we provide a safe and supportive environment for all. I served as a principal, assistant principal, and teacher for more than 30 years and I understand the impact a positive climate has on student well-being and teaching and learning. As a parent, I know deeply the trust we place in schools in keeping our children safe. That is why, as a system, we are using all legally available tools and resources to protect students and hold accountable those who break the rules.

We made significant investments in proactive safety measures this year. They include—

- Hiring more than 150 student safety assistants for secondary schools.
- Increasing the number of counselors and, in partnership with county government partners, assigning additional School Resource Officers (SROs) to specific schools.
- Developing new [safety guidelines for athletic events](#).
- Updating [transportation procedures and expectations](#), including the process for bus drivers to report disruptive and dangerous behaviors.
- Revising the [Student Handbook and Code of Conduct](#). Schools reviewed this content with students in class and parents were required to review and sign off as well.

On October 13, 2022, more than 300 attendees joined me at our virtual safety town hall. During the meeting, Board Chair Julie Henn, Baltimore County Police, school system leaders, and I described joint efforts to enhance safety and hold students and parents accountable for dangerous and disruptive behaviors. We acknowledged that the vast majority of our 111,084 students come to school ready to learn, engage positively and follow the rules. However, the intolerable actions of 8.2 percent of students who have engaged in fights and other aggressive behaviors this school year, create the impression that violent behavior is the norm and accepted in our schools, and that there are no consequences for aggressive behavior. That is categorically false.

Here are the facts: student fights and other aggressive behaviors are down 11 percent overall from the same time last year, *but still occur too often and require urgent attention*. High schools and elementary schools experienced a 15 percent reduction in violent behavior and middle school incidents dropped by 8 percent. More than 84 percent of students who fight or display aggressive behaviors are and will continue to be suspended. Students who engage in extremely dangerous or repeat behaviors are and will continue to be reassigned to our alternative programs or to the Virtual Learning Program. Data from the state show that out-of-school suspensions for aggressive behaviors in BCPS have increased in the past two years, in direct contradiction to inaccurate information that has been shared by certain members of our community and in news stories (see table 1). I share this data to demonstrate the progress that has been made while fully acknowledging that we have a great deal of work left to do. Our analysis of middle school data has revealed wide variability in the implementation of consequences. Central office staff will continue to review the data and provide support and feedback to schools. Sixth grade is the only

Raising the bar, Closing gaps, Preparing for our future

grade in BCPS that is experiencing an increase in more aggressive behaviors this year compared to the same time last year. Following middle school, we are seeing indications that ninth and tenth grades also require intense focus, confirming that students in transition years need differentiated support and intervention.

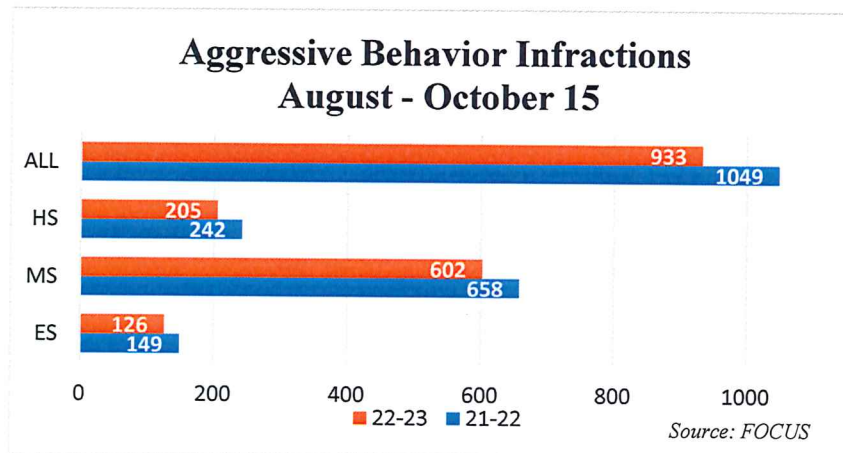
Table 1. Total Major Referrals in Baltimore County Public Schools 2017- 2022

School Year	Total Major Referrals*	Total Suspension Count	Percent Suspension Count
2017-2018	7625	3560	46.7%
2018-2019	7880	4026	51.1%
2021-2022	6422	5003	77.9%

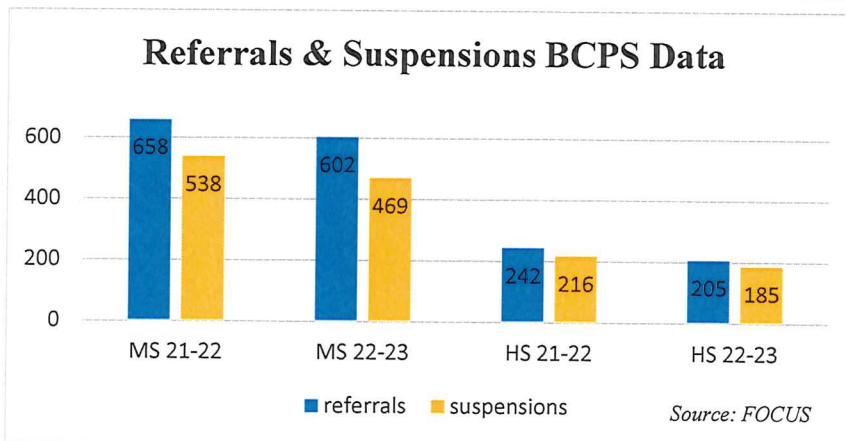
Source: Maryland State Department of Education

*Aggressive Behavior Referrals

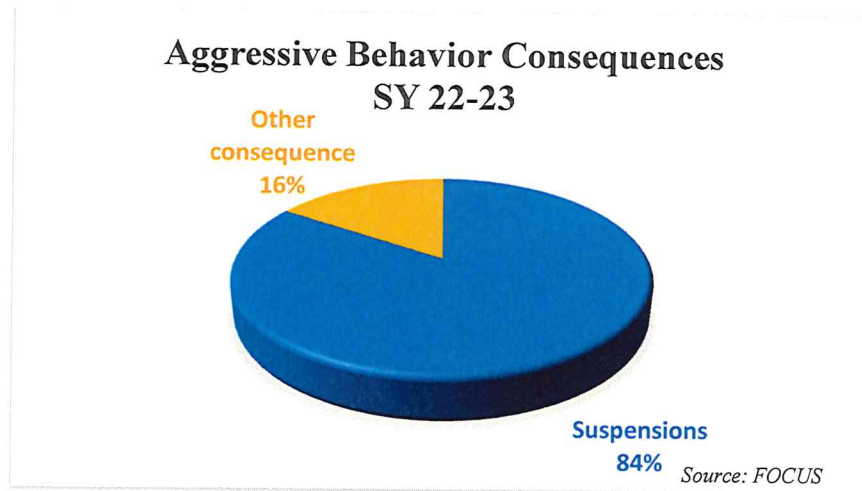
Graph 1. Aggressive Behavior Infractions, August–October 15 – 2021 vs. 2022



Graph 2. Aggressive Behaviors Referrals & Suspensions, Secondary Schools 2021 & 2022



Graph 3. Aggressive Behavior Consequences, School Year 2022-23



What are the consequences for students involved in physical fights?

- Short-term suspensions up to 10 days.
- Long term suspensions – 11 days to expulsion –issued through the Student Conduct Hearing Officer.
- Arrests/criminal charges issued, when appropriate, by the Baltimore County Police Department.
- Mediation/restorative conferences may be held to resolve the conflict, *after consequences have been applied*.
- Community conferencing is offered to families to address long-standing community conflict.

System discipline data is analyzed weekly for trends and concerns. Follow-up is provided directly to schools where there is misalignment with expectations. Support includes additional staff, community resources and direct intervention by the Department of Schools.

While federal laws prohibit the sharing of specific information about individual student consequences, moving forward, we will provide quarterly, front-facing discipline data so that our community sees evidence of our work. Additionally, future town halls and community conversations and engagement will be strategically held to meet unique community needs. In November, our community conversation will focus on middle schools, based on data shared in this message. As always, we will continue to collaborate with county partners to share resources and provide comprehensive services to identified communities.

Our schools are not islands but are part of larger communities. Ensuring student safety requires parents, guardians, students, and community stepping up and saying *enough is enough*. The behaviors we model at home and values we instill in our children have tremendous impact on the schoolhouse. We know that many of our school safety issues stem from unresolved community conflict and are often amplified on social media. We call on parents to limit or monitor student

social media, join with the school community to provide a positive presence and to share safety concerns directly with school leaders who will ensure they are addressed swiftly.

November 14-18, 2022, is American Education Week. For the first time since 2019 we are inviting parents to experience this visitation event in-person. It would send a powerful message to students and staff if members of the community showed up to see the many positive experiences our school teams create for our students every day in BCPS. Thank you for your partnership.

With Appreciation,



Darryl L. Williams, Ed.D.
Superintendent