

Superintendent's Testimony
Howard County Executive Budget Hearing – March 5, 2019

Good evening, County Executive Ball and citizens of Howard County. Before I begin, I'd like to ask our administrators, educators and staff who are here today to please stand and be recognized.

The Howard County Public School System greatly appreciates the strong support we have received from our county government leaders, and your shared commitment to ensuring educational excellence.

Over the past two years, we have moved our school system from a state of chaos, and through a process of re-stabilization. This work required many difficult decisions to restructure staff, eliminate or reduce programs, streamline processes and reduce expenses. It led to the development of a carefully developed Strategic Call to Action that identifies key priorities and performance indicators to guide our work and target funding toward our most strategic priorities.

Our system's forward progress requires defining our critical needs in order to overcome the barriers that stand in the way of achievement for our most vulnerable students. These needs include increased staffing and supports to serve students requiring special education services, and those who are challenged by mental health and social-behavioral issues, or affected by poverty, language barriers and other factors that can interfere with learning and well-being.

Getting caught up in the numbers, or choosing to further postpone necessary investments, will not provide for the very real needs that are not going away. We must provide our students with an equitable, inclusive and nurturing educational program that will prepare them to thrive in the rapidly-evolving, global environment that awaits them. Our children are waiting for us now.

The Spending Affordability Advisory Committee recently released a report that acknowledged a significant gap between the county's revenues and ability to address the needs of our community. This is understandably a challenge that makes your task of allocating dollars very difficult. As Superintendent to 58,000 children, their families and our community partners, I must identify the areas where our children and families are struggling and strongly advocate for the solutions that provide the supports they need. Ten years ago, issues like mental health, restorative and inclusive

supports, and support for international families were not a priority of this system and funding was not requested. Today, we face a very different reality and these issues impact the academic and social-emotional progress of our children.

Our single highest priority is to provide every student with supports and opportunities to thrive in school and realize a highly successful future. The budget that was requested by the Board of Education will help us begin to address these needs. Please understand that the needs of our students are not going to change year after year. This is why it is so important, as the Spending Affordability Advisory Committee recommended, that the county secures sustainable revenue sources to help us address these needs.

Our system's continued success depends upon maintaining and attracting highly qualified employees, and attracting candidates who reflect the diversity of our community. Howard County is landlocked, and we compete with neighboring counties that are more favorably-situated for a shrinking pool of highly qualified educators, and even smaller numbers of applicants who reflect the diversity of our students. This requires a negotiated compensation package that is commensurate with the skills and experience of a highly-qualified staff, and which absorbs the impact of rapidly rising benefit costs.

We also have an obligation to equip our staff with the learning tools critical to an effective learning environment, including improving the ratios in critical areas of health and mental health, counseling, special education and other areas to get closer to national standards. I appreciate the work of your Transition Committee chaired by Senator Guzzone. Their report highlighted the challenges we face and you'll find that our budget reflects many of their recommendations.

I want to thank you for the strong support that you have always provided to our schools and students, and look forward to our ongoing collaboration in ensuring the resources necessary to provide the quality education, in a nurturing learning environment, that every Howard County child needs and deserves.

Michael J. Martirano, Ed.D.
Superintendent